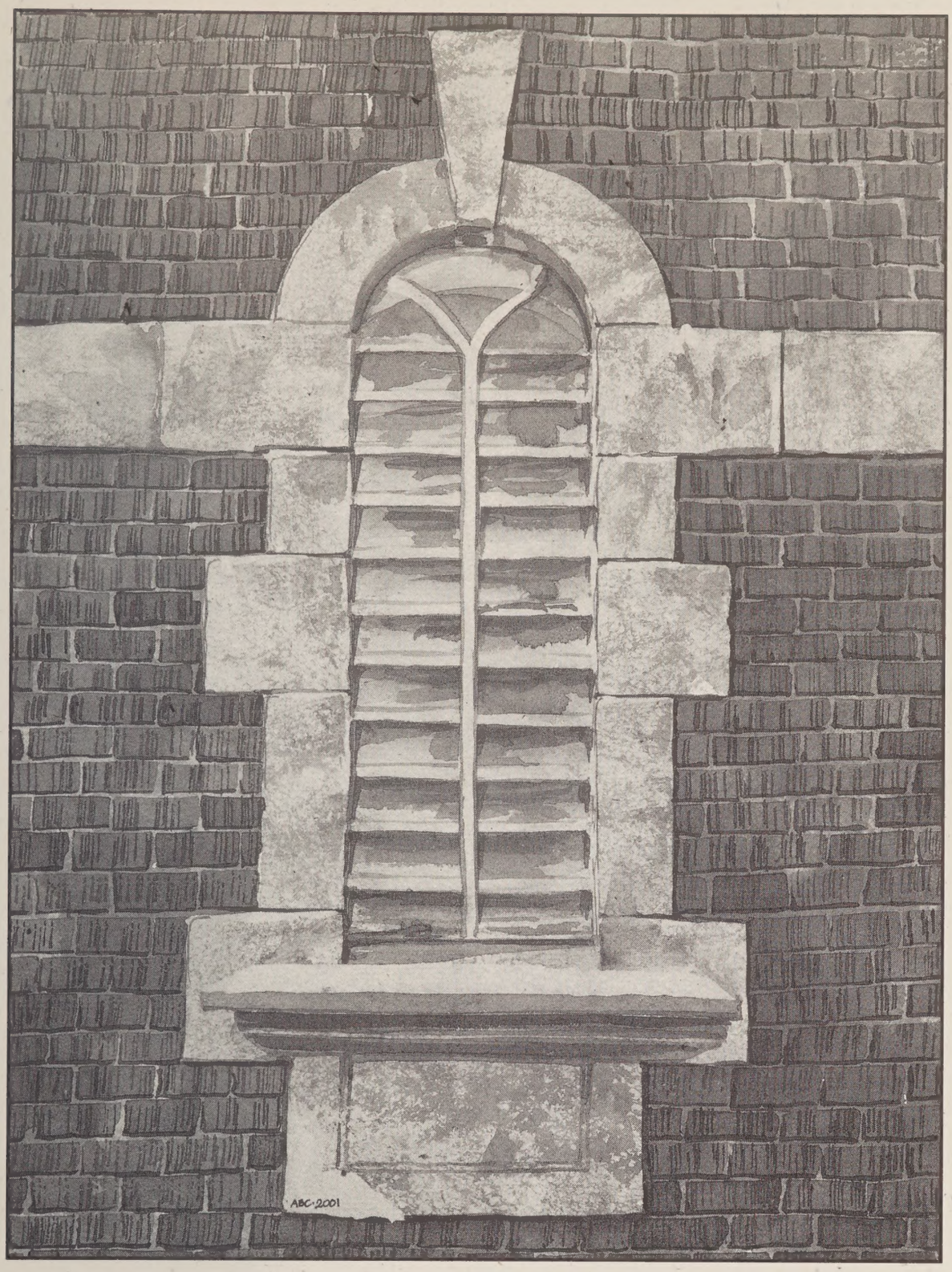

Victoria Press

2001

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College

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Seventh Issue

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Asheville, North Carolina

2001

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This issue is dedicated to Celia Miles, who began the journey.

2001
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Cover watercolor of Ivy Building by Annie Cicale

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

A Hummingbird Stuck in a Spider Web

Michael McFee

What small annunciation is this?: an angel stalled in mid-air, wings spread, struggling against the tacky strands meant for lesser miracles.

An iridescent fortune falls into my palm, quietens, settles there almost weightless. *Is it still alive?* Yes, panting under its shimmery cape, blinking slowly, resting a long sheathed tongue between nectarless fingers.

Little Gabriel spins around in my hands, squeaking, trying to fly again; but the left wing won't work. Can glory be broken? Who can set such bones, make them hum invisible again?

Wait, you say, *look at this*, and start teasing tangled web from its wing, plucking tough sticky silk from bound feathers until, suddenly, the air buzzes and something zips back toward the green heaven it came from, to nestle in a tiny downy cloud held together with spider webs.

Outside Brevard

Michael McFee

we stepped out of our clothes and into the frigid river
on opposite sides of a boulder so broad and tall

I never did see her luminous gooseflesh

though my ears filled with her gasps as she surfaced
from the same dark water that had just erased my body.

Elegy for a Stranger

Michael McFee

Jim Wayne Miller, 1936-1996

Though we came from the same mountain county
whose name gave "bunk"
to every dictionary of the English language,

I never knew you

except through your books and the far-flung tales
of another dazzling thing
you'd said or done at parties, readings, conferences:

I don't know

if you ever hiked the forest trail above Hindman
but I imagined so
as I walked there last summer, when you were sick:

I didn't know

you would die so soon, but as sunlight deepshafted
the steep downslope, lighting
the groundcover running cedar, that evergreen on a fuse,

I knew

that any mountain-born boy would love to be buried
on such a hillside,
under that coverlet stirred by a steady breeze:

I know

the words you left behind, on the page, in the air,
and I like how
they can still stir us, your orphans, to laughter or tears:

and I do know

that *place* is a permanent word shared by natives,
untranslatable yet as real
as a cup of blackest coffee raised to a sleepy driver's lips,

and I certainly know

we both felt our hearts lift every time we drove home
into Buncombe, that place
where we began, the blue hills smoking, watching, waiting.

Emigrants

Michael McFee

Ithaca, New York

Beagles keep baying somewhere out of sight,
my neighbor's hungry hounds tuning up
for their long ride to field trials out of state:

another dream of home, waking me up
though barking continues when I leave bed
and hurry through the cold house out the door,
my bare feet melting hard frost, my bare head
tilting until it finds that music's source:

a vast wedge of Canada geese passing over,
vectoring toward the familiar ponds and lakes
where I come from, unfrozen winter water,

their lofty doglike honking starting to make
me shiver where I stand with open lifted mouth,

ready to answer that calling, to head back south.

Signatures

Michael McFee

1.

The day before he died,
though he could barely grasp the pen
or see the paper I angled under his hand
so his name would legally fill in the blank,

my father struggled to sign the document
that granted me power of attorney,

laboring to execute the signature
he'd spent a lifetime writing
until it was second nature, his name's fingerprint,
his seal, his identifying mark, his standard,
him.

2.

He wrote even more slowly
than I did as a schoolkid learning cursive
when I copied his signature again and again
simply because it was so beautiful,
girlish almost, a model of old-fashioned penmanship
flowing across the page in a graceful tilt—

the W a series of quick looping arcs
landing in a superscript m
held in the air by a single dot beneath,

the H an unbroken combination of strokes
like an intricate antique knot,

the M the inverse of the initial W
beside a c balanced on double vertical lines
leading to the final flourish of a capital F
and the simplest letters of all,
the double e's that meant you were free,

you'd done it, you'd signed the family name.

3.

I'd watched his signature degenerate
on the checks he'd had to sign
in the preceding months, after his heart attack,

from a shaky version of his fluent script,
to a scrawl so drifty
it looked like his name had been violently shaken,
to a wavery horizontal line
with lumps where all the capitals should be.

That penultimate day in the hospital,
he worked a very long time to scratch out his name,

illegible, legal.

4.

My own signature had become
a high-speed fit of dense lower-casey letters,
a decadent *fin de siecle* corruption
of the ideal style tacked above the blackboards
by gradeschool teachers,

tiny arrows and numbers showing us
how to move our pencils in a kind of dance
so we could write like adults,

like the perfect cursive of Wm H. McFee.

5.

How badly I wanted to take his halting hand
inside my own unsteady one
and help him shape the letters I never forgot,
down to the least arc and loop and flourish,

but I couldn't, I had to be patient
and watch him painstakingly unname himself,
the last rite of writing,

the last mark he would ever make in this world.

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

On a Slant

Celia Miles

Josh lived for three months on a slant.

"Dear kids," she wrote, "You'd never believe your mother has to walk sideways just to stand up. My home is hotter than the top side of a sunning blacksnake, not that you've ever seen a blacksnake sunning, not on the sidewalks of Roanoke. Imagine the sun baking, imagine the heat in your father's eyes when he was blazing mad and triple it, and you've got the temperature of my summer place."

Josh, short for Jocelyn. God knows where her addle-headed mama came up with that name. Likely some true story magazine about a bad girl turned good or a good girl turned bad, and Mama would have known about both ends of that equation. Josh let the air whoosh by her as she swung the trailer door back and forth, fanning the inside, stirring the air before she could enter and prop the door open. The screen door, for which she was thankful, had two big rips in it but, with careful tying with some kudzu vines, it kept most of the flying creatures out; those that made it inside died in the heat when she closed up her place for the morning and crept through the fields to work. So she lived with fried insects in the dying heat of the late afternoon.

"There's a spring close by," she wrote to a former neighbor, "cool water's a blessing down here. And it's cool under the big sycamore trees, down under the bank a ways so the two cows don't bother it." They muddied the stream further down, standing in the water hoof-deep so that Josh wondered if they felt its effect at all, flicking their tails at the cousins of the dead flies in her living room, dipping their nostrils and wuffing in the shallows.

Josh stepped on the large rock she'd placed where a step had once been and heaved herself into the room, welcoming its shadows, stifling as they were. She swung her backpack to the floor where it slid toward the downward side of the trailer. Her toes in thin canvas shoes from the Dollar General gripped the floor as she leaned forward. After a few minutes, she could manage the slant pretty well. And she was grateful for it. Who was going to suspect someone was living in a trailer in the middle of a hot, unplanted, former tomato patch in the middle of Sommer County in the off-center of north Georgia?

"Nobody had lived here some time," she wrote her mother. "That's why I got it so cheap." Dirt cheap, no rent at all. The trailer sat empty, hot, rusting, falling forward where foundation blocks had slipped. As far as Josh could tell, nobody claimed the trailer and she didn't want to know who owned the land. Some college graduate had probably inherited the family property and didn't ever intend to live there, maybe rent it out some day. Maybe the white house on the stone foundation two curves down the road was the old homestead. A "Rental property

by RePro" sign stood in the front yard and a Suburban with Florida license plates in the driveway most mornings.

Josh squatted and with her left leg hooked the backpack and pulled it to her, retrieved a plastic bottle of water and took a long drink; it was wet and still cool. She rolled the bottle over her forehead and let the backpack begin its slide back to the base of the window. She stood and wedged the bottle on the counter, behind a loaf of white bread, limp but edible. Her shirt was soaked through, completely wet and she peeled herself out of it, hanging it neatly on a wire hanger which dangled from a cabinet drawer. Her bra followed. She studied it, ratty, yellowed, but a necessary item. She didn't quite dare go to work without it, whether she considered it protection or provocation.

"Mrs. Watson doesn't like me," she wrote to her former boss, "but Mr. Watson's bound to keep me on. He knows a good worker when he sees one." Mrs. Watson's eyes had shrewdly appraised the mature ripeness of her bosom; Josh was sure that was the term she used. And Mrs. Watson also knew she'd be a good worker. Better to have this one working around the place than risk some desperate seventeen-year-old looking for any summer work, more full of problems than strength or sense, not so filled out, but likely more tempting to a man's eye, even Watson's eye, and he'd been known to brush against women now and again, pretending innocence when they moved back, never thinking Mrs. Watson noticed, pulled her lips into a frown, and never offered those women "discounts" or freebies. With a nod, she'd given assent and left the room.

Mr. Watson shrugged and ground out his cigarette on the cement floor. He pushed the W-2 forms toward her.

"I won't be working enough for that," Josh said. "Just enough to get a ticket on to Idaho where my kids stay with my mother." The state of Idaho just slipped out and was apparently what she needed. Who would lie about wanting to get to Idaho?

"It's the regulation," Mr. Watson offered weakly, already thinking, Josh knew, that he could pay even less than minimum wage maybe.

"I don't need much," Josh helped him out. "I'm low maintenance this summer." She'd slept in the slanted trailer two nights and what she said was the truth. Mr. Watson looked at this woman who was looking sideways at the display of honey. He didn't give a goddamn about her kids or her rent. He did need a steady worker through the tourist season.

"Five dollars a hour is about all I can afford," he said. "Can give you maybe twenty-five, thirty hours a week."

Josh ignored the government forms; he was hooked. And so far he hadn't done more than glance at her breasts. "What about some of this stuff?" She indicated the boxes, bins, bushel baskets of produce around them. He'd pulled down a heavy screen attachment to close out customers, it being close to seven o'clock. The open-faced building already smelled of peaches on the edge of rotten, tomatoes softening, cucumbers mushy.

Mr. Watson must have suddenly felt generous. "Take anything we can't sell in the morning," he said. "Save a little work that way."

Josh was glad she'd splurged on the two hotdogs for a dollar at the convenience store up the highway so her stomach wouldn't betray her. "Thanks," she said. "And five is fine, for now. What time in the morning?"

"Before eight, close to seven if you can make it." Mr. Watson didn't see a car, didn't know how she'd get here but that was her business. 'Start by throwing out the rotten stuff, spray the rest, fill up the bins, set out what's been unloaded in the back." He grunted. "Both me and my wife's got bad backs. Need somebody to do the heavy lifting, now J.C.'s graduated and got a scholarship to West Point. West Point, by God. He's my cousin's boy." He pulled a packet from his pocket and offered her a Camel.

"No thanks," Josh said. "Never developed the habit." She didn't say her daddy'd died struggling for breath, with his forbidden cigarettes on the night stand and her mother puffing away and wailing in the doorway. "I can take some of these peaches now," she said. "Peaches you don't get much out in Idaho." She hoped that was true, could tell by Mr. Watson's face that he didn't know and didn't care.

She'd thought what the absence of a car might imply to any employer. Watson's Fruit and Vegtable stand was, in that regard, the perfect spot. A couple of hundred yards down the highway, a seedy one-story motel, The Blue Ridge, sat off on a side road, once the main highway. If she walked that way, anybody would think it was her destination since beyond was only a small dam and then National Forest land. This she knew from the talkative clerk at the convenience store. Once out of sight of Watson's misspelled Fruit and Vegtable stand, she could cut across the field next to a boys' school and then walk the gravel road a mile or so. Rather than approach the trailer directly from the road, however, she slipped down a small incline and around an abandoned Christmas tree farm with its now tall, unkempt trees, alongside the dusty barbed wire fence overgrown with morning glories and blackberry briars and to her trailer slanted in the midst of the joe pye and ironweed. A long walk and hot as hell but it might not be much worse than The Blue Ridge Motel—if only it had running water and a bath room.

"You wouldn't believe how pretty it is here," she wrote to her aunt. "The mountains are in a haze every morning, not smog exactly, a real fog and they just rise up hazy and misty. The flowers are lovely, and the sunsets are orange and red. Not much traffic; you couldn't stand the peacefulness." The only noisy traffic was occasional squealing of tires as teenagers (she imagined) bet their lives rounding each curve, spraying gravel and throwing beer cans into the weeds, and the growling of shifting gears as dump trucks crept along the road, heavy as pregnant sows. One of these days a growling truck was bound to meet a speeding Mustang or a Dodge pickup in a blind curve. It happened apparently all over this part of Georgia, according to talk at the Fruit and Vegtable stand. "'Nother one of Jackson's boys wound up in the hospital last night. How his mama can stand it, I don't know. You'd think after his brother, them other boys would slow down, but,

no. He plowed right through a fence and was throwed out, lucky he didn't have a seatbelt on or he'd a-been killed when the car rolled over. All three of them's been sent to Atlanta with broke bones. The Jackson boy's the worse but he'll live they say."

The trailer, slanted like a tipsy box, its aluminum reinforcing edges gleaming in the moonlight, had looked to Josh like a refuge of the first order. She'd literally crawled to it on her hands and knees, dragging her backpack. One side of her face would show a bruise and her shoulder hurt.

"An acquaintance told me about this area," she wrote to a friend, "and was good enough to give me a ride." The trucker had left the main highway, his brooding face bulldoggish, after she'd refused to scoot closer to him, refused his roaming hand. She'd sensed danger when he yanked the semi-cab off onto the gravel road and asked bluntly, "What did ya think I picked you up for? Solitaire?" When he'd braked on a bad curve, she'd scrambled to open the door. The bruises were the result of his grabbing and her tumbling to the kudzu-covered ground. She'd rolled down the bank and was out of sight before he could stop the truck. He got out and stood looking, cursed a few times, turned to pee into the darkness and then slammed the door. Josh stayed out of sight until she heard the truck stop further on, turn around, and head back toward the highway. The trailer door opened easily and she'd slept on a slant as naturally as the cows flicked flies.

Josh stretched out on the shag carpet, sending little puffs of dust upward. The grime of long years bit into her back but stretching felt good; she closed her eyes and let trickles of sweat soak into the waistband of her jeans. Considering she'd worn those jeans five days and walked and worked and sweated in them, they were amazingly clean. At every chance, she sponged off stains or smudges in the tiny toilet tucked behind the fruit stand. On payday she could surely get a ride down to Clayton and find a laundromat and another pair of pants at the Dollar General or a consignment shop. For long moments she kept her eyes closed until her head swirled away memory and she wasn't sure whether she stood or lay or even existed.

"I am settling in very well here, like my job although it's more physical than when I worked at Blakemore," she wrote to former colleagues. "I make enough to keep me in all the things I need and there's no real problems." She simply ignored the blisters on her feet caused by walking at least three miles in three-dollar shoes. She stopped by the convenience store's restroom to scrub all over and to wash her extra shirt which she then tucked into a plastic bag. She ate bananas, peaches, tomatoes, carrots, celery, cabbage, apples, pears—anything which didn't require cooking—and sandwiches made with peanut butter in the morning before it almost melted to oil. Occasionally a customer at the stand would say, "I'm going up to Joe's. Want me to bring you a cup of coffee on my way back?" She stayed far enough away from Mr. Watson so that his wife finally turned her back to them without wondering or peeping, and she never complained about the muck around back, the slippery backroom floor where she sorted, tossed, sprayed, unbagged and unboxed the fruits and vegetables. She'd thought

the produce would be locally grown and some was, but most was trucked in and unloaded at the back of the building, perhaps to preserve the illusion of homegrown even for the local customers.

If anybody cared about the "new woman working at Watsons," they did not seem particularly interested. It might have been different if she'd been younger but the graying streaks in her hair and her thickening hips meant the young neighborhood studs looked once but not twice. Her face was neither plump nor lean, her nose neither big nor stubby cute. A loose shirt obscured both her breasts and her hips. One boy had eyed her and described her shape in gestures to his buddies in the car; Mrs. Watson smiled to hear one of them mutter, "Might as well screw your aunt."

Josh's one particularity was the inability to look anyone directly in the eye. She looked to the side, to the other side, slightly to the left or right of ears . . . anywhere but directly at the person addressing her. Josh's askew glances Mrs. Watson noticed only on the second day of her work and she tried by increasing the volume of her voice and by placing her hands on her hips to steer Josh's eyes directly to hers. It didn't work.

The snake lay across the barely distinguishable path she'd made to the trailer. In the hot sunlight, flecks of brownish gold seemed to fly into the air, even as Josh stopped dead still and waited, her arms at her side, one holding her backpack, the other a brown paper bag with a cold drink and pimento cheese sandwich. She knew it wasn't a blacksnake; its pinkish body had brown bands running across it, with small dark splotches in between. Her chest was an instant dam, too thin to contain the pounding flood. Surely the thumping harshness would propel the snake along. She could see perhaps three feet before its tail diminished in the weeds. It was flattened out, its body not glistening but matte-like, with a wrinkle where it covered a small stick on the ground. A small white butterfly fluttered around the Queen Ann's Lace close to Josh's elbow; a cowbell sounded down by the stream, then a muted siren on the highway. Sweat dripped into her eyes but she couldn't lift her arms to wipe it away—paralyzed, as before. In the salty blur the snake expanded fuzzily. Oh, God, Josh thought, I can't move. She didn't think she could step at all. To her left was its head; to step right where its tail disappeared into the high dusty weeds might be to encounter its mate. Josh stood, as before. Dampened by the cold bottle, the paper bag broke and the liter of Pepsi thumped at her feet. She jumped, and the snake slithered away faster than she wanted to believe possible, yet in slow motion before her sweaty eyes.

Josh picked up the Pepsi and hugged it to her side, its coolness assuring her of something, that she was alive, that an accident of picking up a used paper bag rather than plastic that day had broken the spell, that the snake was as vulnerable as she . . . something.

Of course, if the snake, or any snake, had wanted the shelter, the security of the slanted trailer, it could have availed itself of dozens, hundreds of

opportunities to enter, as Josh saw cracks at doors, windows, floors. She had to believe no snake wanted where she lived.

"My place is lovely," she wrote to a friend, "but too isolated to be a desirable location for tourists at any rate. I have peace and quiet galore." As she placed her backpack under her head later in the evening, soon after darkness enveloped the valley, she shuddered violently once, then closed her eyes, hoping for sleep. It came as always to her exhausted body and, while other nights she had dreams of another life, this night her dreams slithered away, illusive as truth.

Josh awoke with an intense awareness of where she was, the light filtering through the dust motes, her white feet straight before her, her damp hair smelling slightly dank. The snake she was certain would make another appearance. For the next few days, she went about her routine as if she waited for something. Mr. Watson noticed and maneuvered his body closer, not touching. "Expecting a letter or something? Somebody coming to visit?" he asked.

She saw it, surely the same snake, by the stream, again stretched out, in no hurry, secure and lazing in the shadows. Had she not been alert, vigilant, she'd have missed it. It occupied a brownish log, had appropriated the very place Josh had thought to sit and soak her feet in the sluggish water. Its tongue flicked in and out as she watched. Intensely focused on the creature, she ran her own tongue over her dry lips. She'd looked up *snakes* in a paperback in the convenience store, and its markings told her copperhead. Her childhood knowledge told her poisonous; the book said "low toxicity." This time she carried no Pepsi to warn her and no stick to protect her, yet she stood, refusing to retreat. Not that she was sure she'd sit on the log if the snake did take itself off, but neither was she going to back up. Not yet, anyway. She looked down on the snake, sweating even while goose pimples prickled her arms. She stood so long that the cows on the other side of the stream went back to munching and then again raised their inquisitive heads to check on her presence. When she stood still, they again resumed their chewing. Josh's eyes watched the snake's triangular head and long length, she and it poised for retreat or attack. The goose pimples calmed down on her arms and she became aware of a sharp stone biting into the toughened sole of her right foot. When the snake raised its head slightly, Josh's eyes skewed away, and it gathered itself up, and took its leave with only a couple of final flicks. It veered not toward her but away, going home.

A softness came over Josh and she sank to the ground gracefully, assuming almost a true yoga position. Well, she thought, well . . . . After a few seconds she glanced at the watching cows and giggled. "Silly cows," she said aloud. Then she slid her feet into the water, wincing at the ache it provided her raw blisters. Walking toward the trailer, she kept a close watch about her but she didn't expect to see the snake again. Not that day.

No one can truly remain unknown, even in rural north Georgia, and before the end of the summer a few people were aware of Josh's living quarters. Curious, Mr. Watson followed her one day and saw that The Blue Ridge was not her

destination, saw her continue. And in the way of such places, piece by piece some people put together the puzzle. Mr. Watson didn't tell his wife, but one evening she referred to Josh as "burning up in that trailer on Aiken's property." Josh continued in ignorance of their knowledge, becoming friendly with local customers, joking with Sue at the convenience store, hitching a ride with Jim or Zack into town, returning to her metal box each evening.

"Living here is a challenge," she wrote to her former pastor, "I am trying to face . . ." She decided to delay writing to the minister. She would wait.

It was mid-August when the snake reappeared. She'd been watching the ground, been watching logs and big rocks at the stream and on her route home. She didn't expect to see it almost at eye level. And she uttered a little "Yikes!" under her breath. It curled atop a fence post at the outer limits of the Christmas tree farm, actually a post with a kind of platform on it, perhaps where the owner had once placed a martin or bluebird house. Josh stopped. She slipped the backpack from her shoulder to the ground. Waves of cold replaced waves of warmth on her arms, through her body. She steeled herself and stepped forward. She was maybe five feet from the creature. Everything in her wanted to step back, to stumble sideways, to leave it alone, to ignore what she saw. Instead she took another step toward it. One swift forward movement could bury its fangs in her bare arm, in her cheek, or neck. Its head pulled back on itself; aware, very aware, it watched her and flicked its tongue. She stood statue still. Took another step forward. She knew herself to be now at the most vulnerable posture. She had to stoop slightly to be eye level with the snake. Only three feet or so separated them. Josh raised her eyes, gray-blue, the gray-blue of early morning fog. With the inevitability of a rising fog and the imperceptibility of blanketed sunrise she brought her eyes directly level with those of the snake. They gazed at each other. Josh hoped her stone legs would not crumble, that she would not crash to the earth, not startle with any sudden movement. It was not now a question of retreat, not for Josh at any rate. The snake did not move, did not continue its flicking tongue action. She stared into those unblinking vertical pupils, memorizing her fear so it would always be a part of her, called forth by circumstance but not controlling. Josh took a step back carefully, soundlessly, then another step, all the while her eyes threaded straight with the snake's. When her foot snapped a twig, the copperhead shivered its body, uncoiled itself easily, descended the fencepost, found its way into the kudzu vines behind it.

"Dear Mr. Trent," she wrote later that night, "I will be returning to Roanoke in a few weeks when I finish my work here. I will testify against my husband. I will tell what I saw that day at the playground. I can face him and the town." She extracted a slip of paper with the district attorney's address and copied it on the envelope. This letter she mailed.

"Looked straight at me," Mrs. Watson reported to her husband that next evening.

"Yep, me too," he replied. "And she's leaving at the end of the month."

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Poems by Nancy Dillingham

Dreamscape

Swimming in silver
I rise
my life
a skin I have shed

Eyes glittering
graceful as a snake
I stir my starry skies
and breath like Eve

onto my lover's bed

End Game

Together they stay
intertwined like winding-sheets
seeking succor
sucking substance
growing into one another
like parasites
failing to see
the darkness coming

Southern

Kudzu-easy evening—

pretty-by-nights
twinkle in the twilight

Blue moon rises
hunkering down
scratching the sky

moving over mountains
like music
to midnight

gramophone playing
a sweet lullaby

Full Moon at Midnight

Night's tall gypsy
travels the sky

his great eye glowing
tacking his wares
on every wall

a confidence man
in camouflage
fishing for my soul

The Speed of Grace

Nancy Dillingham

"Thou didst put me together in my mother's womb.
I am fearfully and wonderfully made..."
Psalm 139

Nine days weary and worn
choleric and childbirth-ridden
graceless and ashamed

she has lain
against the counterpane
watching her husband

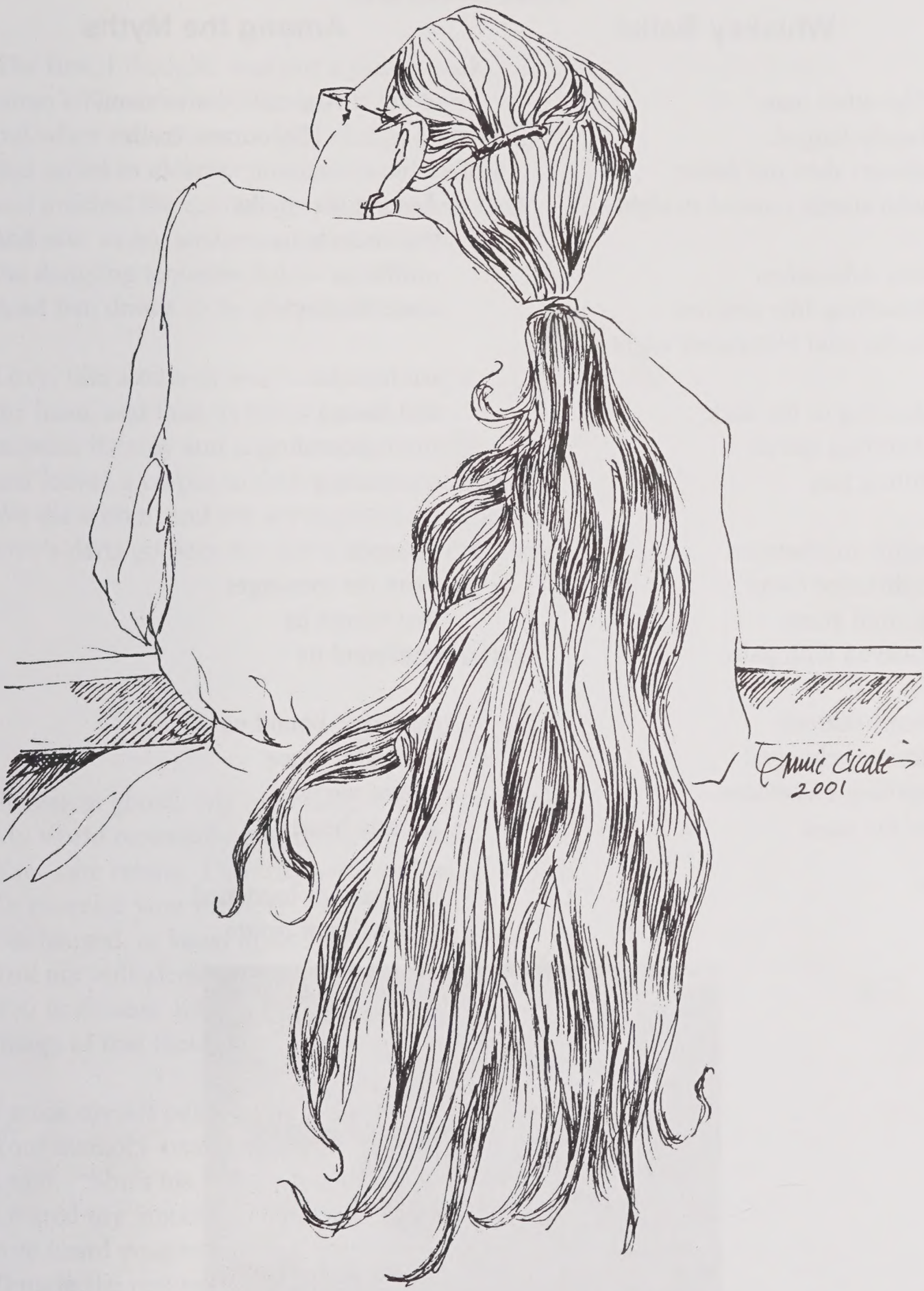
moving like music
through the air
braiding and re-braiding her hair

It is an image she cannot bear...

Fever raging she rises
finds her husband's straight-edged razor
lifts its ivory handle to her head

Shed of frame and shorn
blood like tears in her eyes
salty and warm

she is begirded and reborn



Drawing by Annie Cicale

Poems by Nancy Dillingham

Whiskey Ballet

The other man
bandy-legged
shorter than my father
who stands ramrod straight—

two silhouettes
breathing like engines
in the cold November night

dancing in the dark
distilling spirits
filling jars

while unobserved
a distance away
a child starts
swayed with pain

heart-scarred
forever changed
spilling sweetness
to the stars

Among the Myths

"And ain't I a woman?"
Sojourner Truth

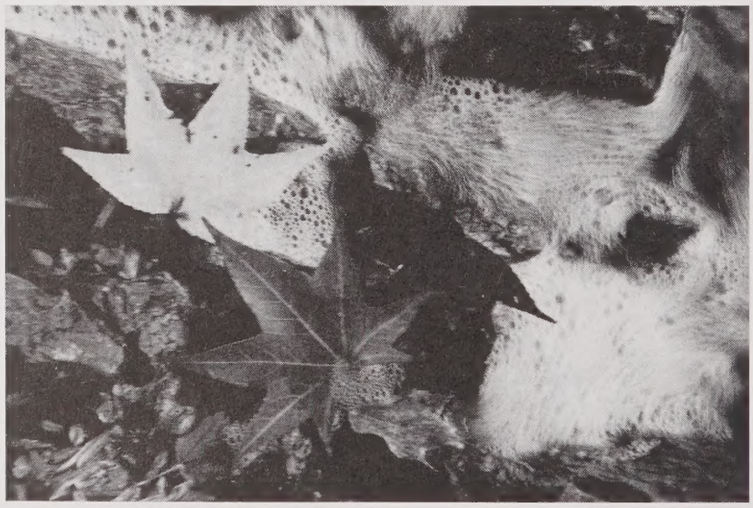
Among the myths
that muzzle us
muffle us
mute the truth

we founder
and forage
for a grounding
a sounding

a respite
from the messages
that hound us
confound us

that have bound us
to a safer place
where we wait
for any heart

that has not hardened
that will not refute



Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Physalia

Gerald A. Metz

The first, I thought, was just a plastic sack:
some kind of fuchsia flotsam off the bow,
but when the next came by I changed my tack
and sailed as close as prudence would allow
and touched the quivering splendor of its flesh
and saw, to my amazement and chagrin,
the dangling tentacles below enmesh
dead fish drawn to its glory as I'd been.

Love, like a man-of-war, compels the eye,
the hand, and then its hidden underside
impales its prey and sails serenely by
and leaves a corpse to drift out with the tide.
We die within, and yet we're pleased to know
love's darts go deep but leave no scars that show.

Nocturne

Gerald A. Metz

Persistent ghost! My eyes have washed you from
My world repeatedly but, helpless, watch
Your sure return. I've tried with well-aged Scotch
To exorcize your memory: you come,
Unchanged, to haunt again. Tears won't expel
You nor will alcohol. There's no evading
You in dreams: lids closed, I see the fading
Image of that face I knew so well.

I made myself believe you'd died. I walled
Your memory away. "Remake your life,"
I said. "She's his. She's someone else's wife."
I feared my fantasy was true, and called,
And heard your voice, and know that you're not dead.
Tonight the restless spirit's mine instead.

Writing *Life*

Gabrielle M. Thompson

Each person has a unique story to tell. The life you have lived and how you have perceived it flavor the composition as does the medium you embrace for expression—poetry, short story, autobiography, essay, creative nonfiction, or novel. I began keeping journals thirty years ago as a means of understanding myself. I continue to write down important occurrences in everyday life, using the practice as a method of working through anger and disappointments and documenting who I am and how I grow. Writing is a clear path to unlocking my inner-knowing, as well as a release. When I write, I sound my deepest emotions to describe or relate what I want to say.

For fourteen years, I chartered in the Caribbean. I have always been an avid reader, yet books were hard to find and expensive to buy. Novels were my passion, and Michener, Wouk, and Uris were favorite authors because they filled their works with a sense of having lived in the place, of having been a part of the story. However, I wasn't picky. I read every single book left behind by charter guests—romance, science fiction, occult, gothic or the occasional best seller—which helped establish a background of knowledge of writing styles and genres. In *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, Stephen King states what I've always known intuitively:

> If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. There's no way around those two things that I'm aware of, no shortcuts . . . . Reading is the creative center of a writer's life. I take a book with me everywhere I go, and find there are all sorts of opportunities to dip in. The trick is to teach yourself to read in small sips as well as in long swallows. Waiting rooms were made for books—of course! But so are theater lobbies before the show, long and boring checkout lines, and everyone's favorite, the john. You can even read while you're driving, thanks to the audiobook revolution . . . . Reading at meals is considered rude in polite society, but if you expect to succeed as a writer, rudeness should be the second-to-least of your concerns. The least of all should be polite society and what it expects. If you intend to write as truthfully as you can, your days as a member of polite society are numbered, anyway.

I began writing during my chartering career, wanting to share my knowledge about the vacation, the Virgin Islands, and their peoples. I submitted

articles to local newspapers and sailing magazines and was thrilled when I saw my name in print.

My first novel began in a nightmare, waking me from a sound sleep—terrified, and gasping for breath. I left the bed, needing to commit it to paper as well as being afraid to go back to sleep and finding myself back in the clutches of the nightmare. As I wrote, the dream took on a life of its own, becoming a story. In the following days, I would compose four to eight pages at my word processor from three to six in the morning before my family arose for school and work. I was energized and happy, though averaging only five hours of sleep a night. The excitement of the creativity kept me going. In *On Writing*, King says that he never plots; he believes stories make themselves, and the writer is the medium of growth. I didn't work from an outline, nor did I know the direction the manuscript would take. At the end of each sitting, I would scratch a few sentences on a scrap sheet of paper. During the day I wondered how it would develop. The following morning my eyes would open at three (I never needed an alarm during this artistic outpouring) and, after a short meditation at my writing desk, the words and pages would flow from a pool of creativity within. I have recently read *Writing in Flow: Keys to Enhanced Creativity*, by Susan K. Perry, who interviewed various authors regarding how they tapped this pool. (All quotes to follow other than Stephen King are from this source.) She describes flow as a challenging activity that has clear goals which you are capable of and on which you are focused to the point of losing awareness of yourself and time. The task becomes self-rewarding. She continues: "Thus, flow, absorption, intense focus and a mood of persistent fascination with an activity are all varied forms of altered consciousness. A few writers learn to use self-hypnosis to put themselves into what may be an actual hypnotic state to gain greater control over their creative output." For me, the act of meditation was my psychological connection, just as I am able go to sleep the second my head hits the pillow—telling myself that is what I'm there for—much to the irritation of my husband! I found the manifestation of my first novel to be a magical experience. When it was complete, I realized how much of it was about me. The heroine's thoughts, dreams, and aspirations were mine. Her desire to be something better than she was—to be connected with God—mirrored my own need. In developing her soul, I had found my own.

When I moved back to the United States, I went to work in a library—a bonanza of books for an addicted reader. Even more exciting, I discovered a realm of how-to books on the craft of writing that I never knew existed.

I began composing essays about the mountains and the seasons I had never before experienced, having been a Californian before my years in the tropics. Overwhelmed by the beauty of Western North Carolina, I wrote creative nonfiction with spiritual overtones. Letty Cottin Pogrebin's words echo how I felt in my new home: "Travel is the ultimate time extender. In a strange, new country, the world slows down because we are paying attention, trying to figure things out. Exotic locales elicit the same sharp focus and intense concentration as

did all of life when we first encountered it." My writing changed as *need* forced dedication, and I accessed a fountain of words. Description of what I saw and the effect it had upon me bubbled to the surface of my awareness. In expressing the beauty of nature I experienced a soul-felt connection. It was a pathway to God. My consciousness expanded to another dimension where thought and feeling became one. At this level, time and the real world ceased to exist. It is akin to a state of grace. Faye Moskowitz shares that sensation: "Words come easily from that reservoir I sometimes believe I have, but never quite know how to tap. This is when time ceases to exist, when all my senses are focused on writing; this is the closest I will ever come to an out-of-body experience, and in the end, it is the possibility of re-creating these moments that keeps me going as a writer."

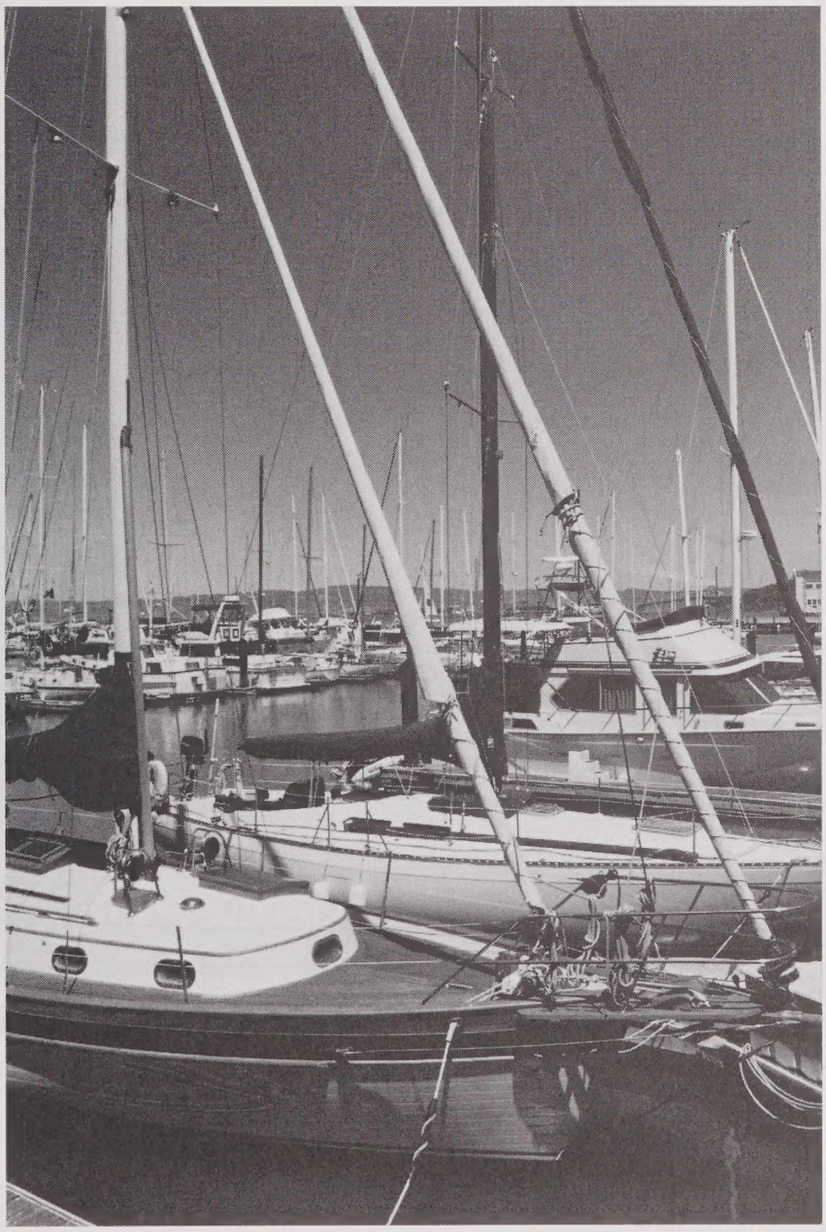
When I began my second novel, I started as before—characters telling their story. However, with this book I wrote 3x5 cards of scenes and plot ideas I wanted to incorporate, and 6x8 cards establishing the characters' physical descriptions and the backgrounds that shaped their lives. I wrote the mornings of my late day at work and took vacation days. On these days, I would sit for twelve to fourteen hours straight, getting as much continuous writing accomplished as I could. Any spare moments were spent reading about the craft of novel writing, which helped me understand stasis, quest, critical choice, pacing, climax, reversal and resolution. The process was never difficult, and I had more sense of control over where the second novel was going. In Perry's book, Merrill Joan Gerber sums up how I felt: "It's a kind of a grace that comes after long preparation, after turning to the subject with a willingness to go there and also after a kind of maturity settles onto the material you've been mulling about. It's a state much to be desired, like love, but can't be willed into being."

It took me ten years to start a book about the Caribbean, and eighteen months to finish. This second book, *Adventures in Paradise*, is set in the multicultural society of St. Thomas in the early Seventies—a place and time where fantasy and reality blended in an exciting life unimagined by most people. It was a story I needed to share and, although fiction, is based in real life. Each of the main characters is a composite of at least three people I knew. The heat of the Caribbean is felt through the heart of shipbuilder Luke Nordstrom as he sails his fifty-foot traditional schooner, *Twilight,* to the Virgin Islands, determined to make a living as a charter boat captain. Accompanied by his Navajo first mate, Jonas Whitehawk, he searches for tropical adventure. Each one finds the woman of his dreams on the island that dances to a reggae beat. My story focuses on their strengths and foibles, trying always to be honest in portraying their attitudes and beliefs. As King says:

> The point is to let each character speak freely, without regard to what the Legion of Decency of the Christian Ladies' Reading Circle may approve of. To do otherwise would be cowardly as well as dishonest, and believe me, writing fiction in America as

we enter the twenty-first century is no job for intellectual cowards. There are lots of would-be censors out here, and although they may have different agendas, they all want basically the same thing: for you to see the world they see . . . or to at least shut up about what you *do* see that's different.

In writing *Adventures in Paradise* I've told a story uniquely my own. It is a course I charted that had never been sailed before. It is how I am able to share myself with my world, by writing life as I have lived it, expressed through fiction. Barbara Kingsolver says it quite well: "I've always had this sort of undercurrent of terror flowing through me when I think about time passing. When I look at a calendar I feel this profound urge not to stop time, but to stick pins in every inch of the way to make sure that it's attached to me, to make sure that I have passed through and will know that I've passed through that passage of time when it's over, and that it won't have just vanished. And writing is the way I do that."



Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Family Reunion

Will Hooper

Who was that?
Everyone was waving at the guy
in that Duke Power truck—
"That's Bill Koone—
the man who lost his 34-year-old daughter last year."
No reason, no rhyme, no alcohol—
seat belt intact—just random chance.

Beautiful clouds and soft rain
on the trees and mountains,
ALL seen from Grandma's porch!
I turn to five-year-old Cody next to me
in the swing and say,
"Aren't the clouds pretty all curly and gray?"

We saw Jack Davis's daughter Sue walking down the road—
Sue says Jack can't remember how to feed himself
or find his way home.

I see Jack in my mind 30 years ago,
a fat disheveled man with a calm sense of humor,
surveying a pack of accepted strays with a smile and a
"damn dogs costin' me a fortune in Purina."

Beautiful flowers in Aunt Leona's garden
in the backyard I ran in when I was 3—

I showed my cousin's kids Cody and Jeffrey
the house I lived in when I was their age—

"Yeah, this road used to be dirt and this hill was higher and the grass was taller.
It's nice to grow up in the country, the grass and sky and mountains so close."

The rain smells beautiful on Grandma's porch,
swinging and eating ice cream with the generations,
watching the field of tall grass across the road
flow in the wind like brushed hair.
The cows drift toward a nest of trees in the slow rain.

In the front yard Uncle Stanley shows off
his rebuilding of Uncle Roger's old truck.
We all stare and feast upon sweet memory, as for a moment
the past is cast in a collection of perfectly formed shapes and curves—

There is something bigger here, sweeping over us and the mountains with the rain.

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Perspective

Words & Music by Will Hooper

(Played moderately in drop-D tuning and Travis-style)

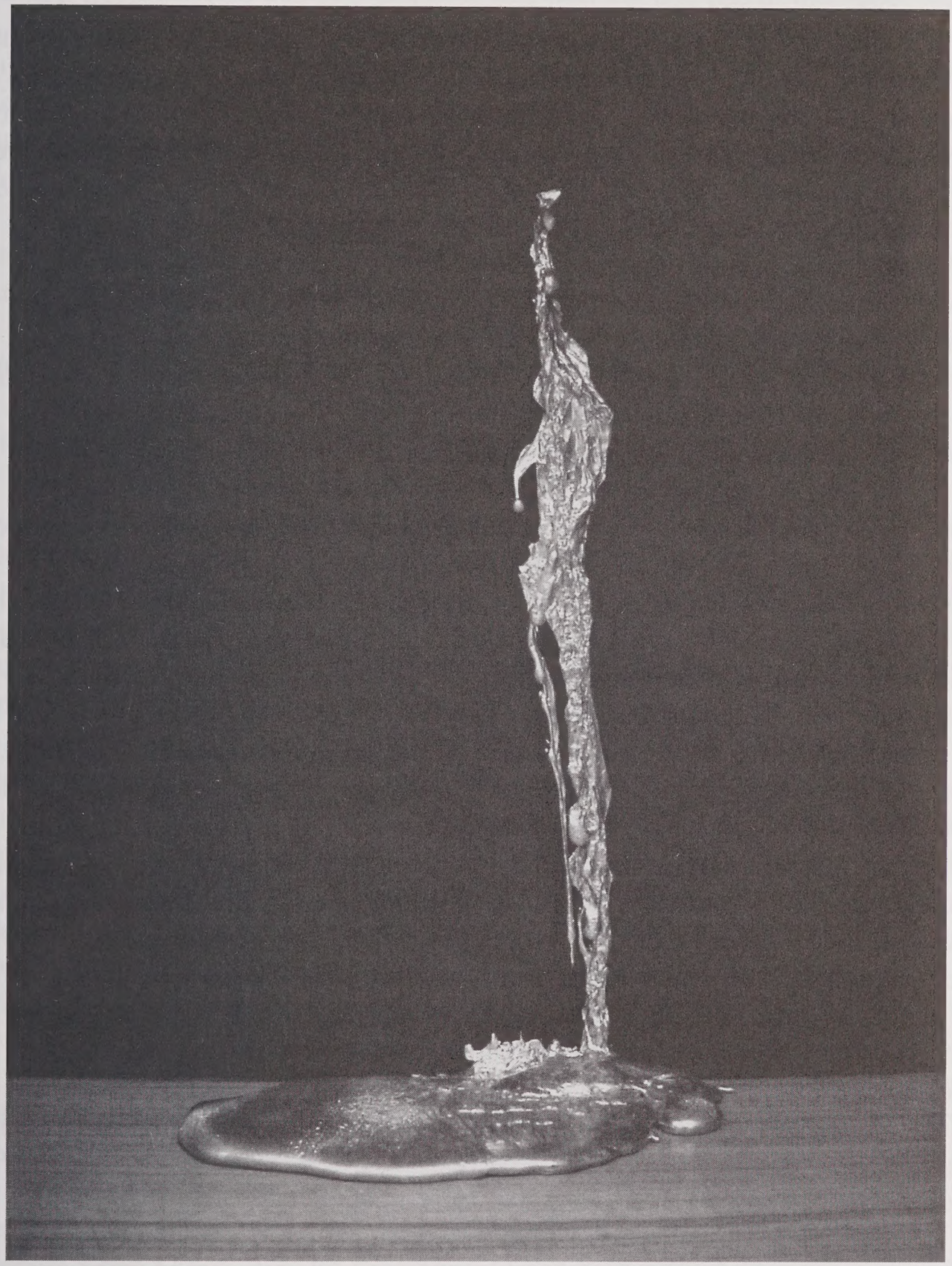
If I could look inside myself
see the man that I am
would I close my eyes in shame
would I call him a friend
So many faces I have known
so many masks I've worn
so many dreams that I have sown
so many seams that I've torn

D/Dsus2/D/Dsus4/D

If I could look in a crystal ball
many heartbeats away
would I know myself at all
what would be left to say
so many sunsets come and gone
so many fallen leaves
would there still be dreams unborn
would I finally be free

If I could look through the eyes of God
and watch the Cosmos expand
would I count each sparrow's fall
what would I think of man
so many stars and planets formed
such a void to know
would there still be worlds unborn
and many seeds to sow

Refrain:
Stand alone on a winter night
watch the northern cross
Cygnus makes his soaring flight
without gain without loss
Look and see his serenity
as he flies from dusk to dawn
His light is still in your eyes
in the morning when he is gone



Sculpture and Photograph by Hank Jackson

An Appalachian Marriage Tale

Diana La Spada

Patty and Craig Brown have been married fifteen years now. She's about ten years older than he is; she's forty-nine. The Browns and I have become pretty close over the last six years since I became a neighbor. This might seem peculiar to some, me being a northern big-city gal and Patty and Craig having roots in the mountains that reach down to the foothills. Nonetheless, the Browns have looked after me from the first, often bringing me garden clippings and good square vegetarian meals prepared mostly by the wife but sometimes by the husband. Many a time I've come home from work exhausted, willing to skip dinner, and there on my kitchen counter rests a paper plate partitioned into Patty's famous sautéed cabbage, diced baked potatoes and onions, eight-hour cooked beans and, always, a cooled-down hunk of cornbread. I think they're afraid that I might die of malnutrition and then they'll have some explaining to do.

Everything about Patty is circular, and she has gotten rounder over the years. Her ample visage recalls one of those puff-cheeked, blowing cloud pictures from an old, illustrated, nursery rhyme book. Her hair stays short, silver, and permed; she doesn't like to mess with it. Craig is tall, lean and good looking, and always has a soda bottle on hand that he can spit into. She's a firecracker. He's a quiet man. He's always sunburnt from his job as a landfill engineer. She's all pinky white like mountain laurel. You can tell they love each other.

That's not to say their marriage is smooth as her homemade cream corn. They've always had a tug-of-war going on: Patty on one end pulling for life and love, his family on the other pulling because they don't know how to let go. I figure four or five on one side and Patty on the other is probably a fair distribution of determination. She says they never accepted her from the beginning and that's how it all got to this point: an icy war with bloody border skirmishes every now and then. It wasn't always this bad. Patty used to try but she got worn down by the slights over the years. She wishes Craig would stand up to them for her. But he won't, and I expect it's because the rope around his waist is too tight in both directions.

One recent afternoon, I answered my ringing telephone and heard a faint, timid female voice on the other end.

"Are you busy?" Patty asked.

"I'll be going to work in a while," I answered.

"Can I come over for a few minutes?"

"Sure."

Her face had turned alabaster, all the pink in it having gathered around the sockets. We sat on my sofa at either end. I was stumbling around some trite opening remarks for a minute or two when she got to the point.

"Big John had two heart attacks last night and he's in the hospital right now dyin'." She was speaking of Craig's granddaddy. He was eighty-four and the only one of her husband's relatives Patty had ever felt an occasional speck of warmth from. Still, he was clan patriarch and working one end of that rope.

"Craig's over there with Edith and Kaye and they decided to take Big John off his blood pressure medicine and let him go. You know Big John was such a strapping big man and now he's down to about your weight, down to about a hundred pounds. But Craig wouldn't let them take away his respirator cause he didn't want Big John to suffocate none."

I listened, knowing immediately the cause of Patty's anguish. Edith, Craig's granny, and Kay, his momma, would not want to be sharing this emotional family moment with her, the enemy. She continued.

"He just called me from a pay phone at the hospital and he is tryin' to figure out all the paperwork they're throwin' at 'im cause Edith and Kaye can't do it. He's never done anything like this before and Oh!," she bellowed, "he's a wailin' an' I can't be there for 'im!" And finally the levee gave way and a flood of fresh tears gushed from her denim-blue eyes.

Before I could reach over and throw my arms around her heaving shoulders, his old navy pickup swung into their gravel driveway and she jumped up crying, "There he is . . . I've got to go to 'im!" She was out the door and across the street like a mother running to rescue her child from an oncoming train. They froze a moment in a grief-stricken embrace, and I could hear her muffled sobbing against his cotton shirt. Presently they went inside.

The next day, sparked with wonder, she told me how she'd never seen Craig take command like he had in the last twenty-four hours, making all sorts of arrangements and such. "Maybe this is a turning point," she said. "Maybe things are gonna be different now. Maybe my prayers have finally been answered." She said that when she told her husband that it was okay if she didn't attend the funeral, he'd stopped what he was doing and said, "Hush. You're my wife, and you'll stand right by my side when the time comes. Besides, I know that, no matter what, you and Big John had a love for each other and it's right for you to be there with me."

Later on Patty told me that just a couple of hours before he passed, Big John had asked for his Patty-blanket, a hand sewn gift she'd made for him years earlier. Vindication swept across her brow.

For what all she has and hasn't got, my neighbor Patty Brown is the most generous person I've ever met. The rejection of her generosity is what cuts deepest. I don't know how far the ripples of Big John's death will circle out, but something has already changed over at the house on the other side of the road. I've heard it in Craig's voice since. One thing I do know: a powerful pair of hands just let go of that frayed old rope, and nothing under the Browns' roof will ever be quite the same again.

Baseball, of Thee We Sing

Diana La Spada

In many of the cooler American states, there are two sure harbingers of oncoming spring: the robin redbreast has returned to nest, and major league baseball has begun batting practice. For me and many others, news of the latter completely stifles bad news about last blasts of winter. It makes just about anything bearable. T-shirted fans in open-aired stadiums under cerulean skies paint a picture that chases the mental grinches away. Dreams of long days, warm nights, and the boys of summer are the winter elixir of the baseball fan.

In a world of bonecrunching, headslamming competition, baseball is a nonviolent sport. Tempers may fly like high poppers on occasion and accidents can occur, but the very structure of the game renders aggression injury almost nonexistent. And it's the only game where, technically speaking, the sum of the parts is greater than the whole, where the individual is given so much time, so much space, and so much opportunity to contribute. Basketball and football may boast of their occasional little guy, but in baseball no particular body type dominates. A man can be short, lean, squat, tall, massive, bow-legged or just plain fat. Or he can be older, like Houston Astros pitcher, Nolan Ryan, who retired in his forties. If a fella can get the job done, he can play ball. Whether baseman, outfielder, batter, catcher or closer, each player reigns in his own territory; yet their efforts combine to produce a unified human machine.

Like the diamond it is played upon, baseball has many facets. It is dance. It's Gene Kelly in all his muscular grace, fingersnapping and threestepping his way around the bases. It's winged Nijinsky, grande jetéeing into the stands to foul out a batter. There's rhythm in the triple play, the grand slam, and even in the wind-up. Choreography abounds in baseball because there is room for it.

Baseball's also a game of wits. While managers theorize and strategize, shuttling their men like knights and pawns on a chessboard, fitting the right man into the right position for just the right play depending upon the opposing team's stats, pitchers and batters are engaged in their own mental duel. Here, the television camera rewards the baseball fan with reels of electrifying close ups as it zooms in to reveal impulse, thought, state of mind. Boston's Roger Clemens was spellbinding as he zeroed in on '86 Mets' batters like a hawk on sighted prey. Atlanta's Javi Lopez's eyelashes quickly brushed his right cheekbone as he copped a stolen glance back and down at a catcher's signal to a pitcher in '97 while Lopez was up at bat. It is the intrinsic psychological stillness of this game, unlike any other professional team sport I can think of, that serves up these memorable gems.

The language of baseball has an appeal of its own. *Sinker, slider, screwball, change-up, bunt, homer, sacrifice fly, batting a thousand,* and *pinch hitter* are just a sampling of the colorful vernacular baseball has donated to the native tongue. Sadly, the phrase "three strikes and you're out" has become so

bastardized it will probably mean something completely unsporting to the next generation of American youth.

The national pastime is America's firstborn sportschild. It may have had English antecedents but so did most of the colonials. Organized in the late 1850's, it had been staged in cow pastures and empty urban lots for some time before that. That kind of time not only gives a game a history; it gives it a mystique. For over a hundred and thirty years, older generations have been waxing nostalgic about the good old golden days of baseball. In this psychic way, baseball's whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It has evolved into American myth; it has become one with the American Dream, an idealized metaphor for life.

Who are these men in helmets and those funny-looking jersey suits? They are the sons of bricklayers, fishermen, and sharecroppers. They are everyman. Where do they come from? They come from Westfield, Alabama, and Spavinaw, Oklahoma, and Wahoo, Nebraska. They come from everywhere. Their's is the naked achievement of daily individual hard work, yet there is the sense of not just fraternity, but family. After all, the game begins and ends at home plate.

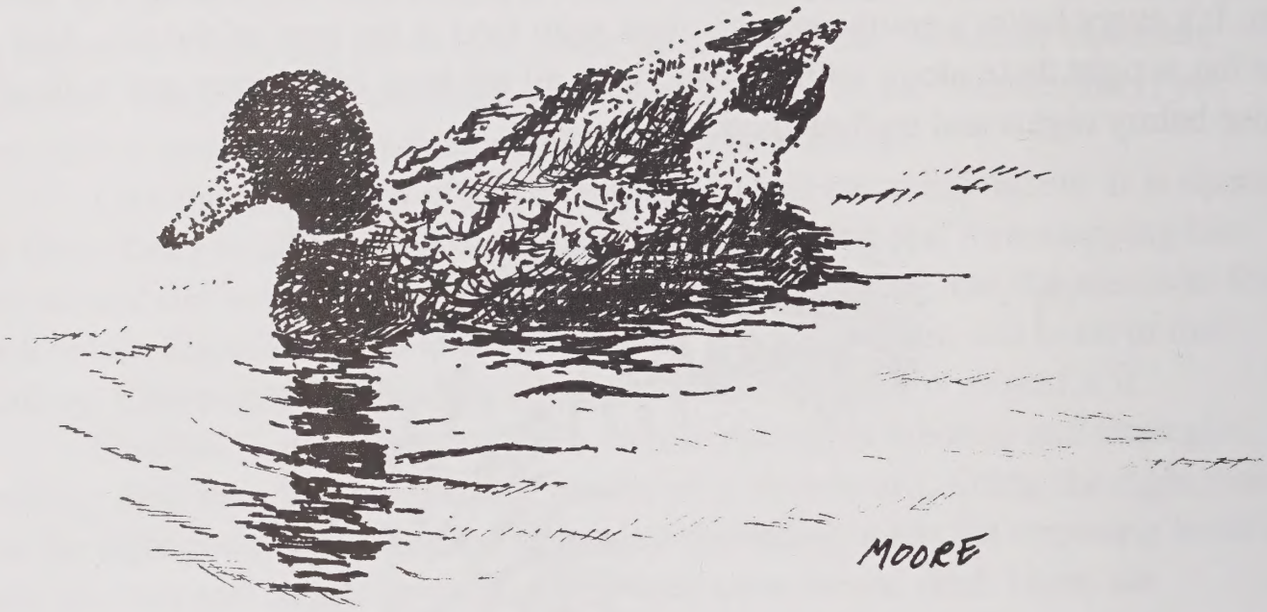
Finally, there is that place in the sun: that glorious, ephemeral interlude when the crack of the wood sends a small white leather sphere hurtling far, far and away into the firmament like Elijah disappearing in his chariot. Time stops . . . and there is silence in the heavens for about the space of half a moment. The home run. It's every batter's apotheosis, his walk with God in the cool of the day. And the fan is right there along with him and with all the boys of summer and with all those balmy nights and endless days.

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Duck Shade

Kenet Adamson

Mallards perch
Tree-like shapes
Beaverdam Lake
Fall Sunday dawn.
Tree shade shapes
Shape and shade the drake.



Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Daddy

Robin Mallernee

The last words my father spoke were, "Let's get this over with." Yesterday, I was remembering my father speak these words and I could just see him sitting in his recliner twisting his right eyebrow worrying over some problem. I wonder when he began to think of his life as something to "get over with."

I know he had a hard life—maybe it started when my mother died so young leaving him with five children, the youngest a newborn. I also think maybe he was in pain for a long time before his death and maybe he gritted his teeth to just get through the days.

I have read inspirational books that suggest we continue to learn from our loved ones even after their death and that is truly a comfort. I was chewing on my cheek and pondering: were these last words a lesson to remember to enjoy life while we have it? Or maybe just a lesson in how to surrender to the dying process once you are there.

Thinking back, his humor on the telephone made all us kids want to call home often, but his disappointment when we shared the details of our lives made us sorry we tried and we would make vows never to call again. But each new life change would tempt us . . . maybe Dad will be proud of me . . . and we would call again.

Visits home would be lots of sitting in the living room, waiting for that opportunity to "talk," hoping something I would say could lure him out of that TV world. Sometimes I would confess to some challenging behavior just to draw an argument.

Sometimes when I was in real trouble I would sit trying to gauge the atmosphere, gathering courage to ask for help. And he always helped me. Many times, as I was bending over his chair to kiss him good-bye, he would slip a fifty-dollar bill into my hand with his hand that felt so strange. He had these tendons that had shrunk and his hand was drawn up and you would feel those hard things.

Still, the last five or six years of Daddy's life were sweet; we healed all our old disagreements. His charm returned and he accepted me and I forgave him.

A few weeks ago in church we were having the group prayer where people usually hold hands and I reached out to this lady sitting beside me and she withdrew her hand. I suddenly felt so rejected and then, with my eyes closed and saying the Lord's Prayer, I felt these three hard tendons take my hand. It surprised me so much my eyes flew open! There was no one there, of course.

Gift Giving

Deborah Lonon

Every Monday morning, Joe, my chain-smoking, world-weary boss at Seaman's Bank for Savings in New York City reminded me: "Yeah, even if you are one in a million, there's eight more just like you."

.....

Oprah Winfrey listened as Betty Eadie tearfully described her experiences while dead. Evidently, Betty had traveled to heaven and back for over two hours during a botched hysterectomy. An artist attempted to simulate some of her descriptions for Oprah's guests. One scene portrayed hundreds of beams shooting from earth to heaven. They were all different sizes and colors and some were much thicker than others. Ms. Eadie said this showed prayers coming to God from earth. Oprah asked why some of the beams were so thick, and Ms. Eadie said, "Oh, those are the prayers coming from mothers."

.....

My mother was home alone watching *Jeopardy* in Vermilion, Ohio. She got the first question right, then another, then another. Six in all. "Then what happened?" I asked. "I started to get really scared," she said.

.....

I can't understand why Paul McCartney has yet to realize how much I mean to him.

.....

My grandmother was in the hospital dying and there was a red pear ripening on the windowsill. On my last visit, we talked and laughed; I sliced the pear and carefully fed it to her. Later that night, after she died, her roommate noticed it was gone. "Oh good," she said. "She got to eat the pear."

.....

Maurice Sendak says he started thinking about "being down in the dumps" as something other than a psychological state after he visited children living in the street slums of Rio de Janeiro.

.....

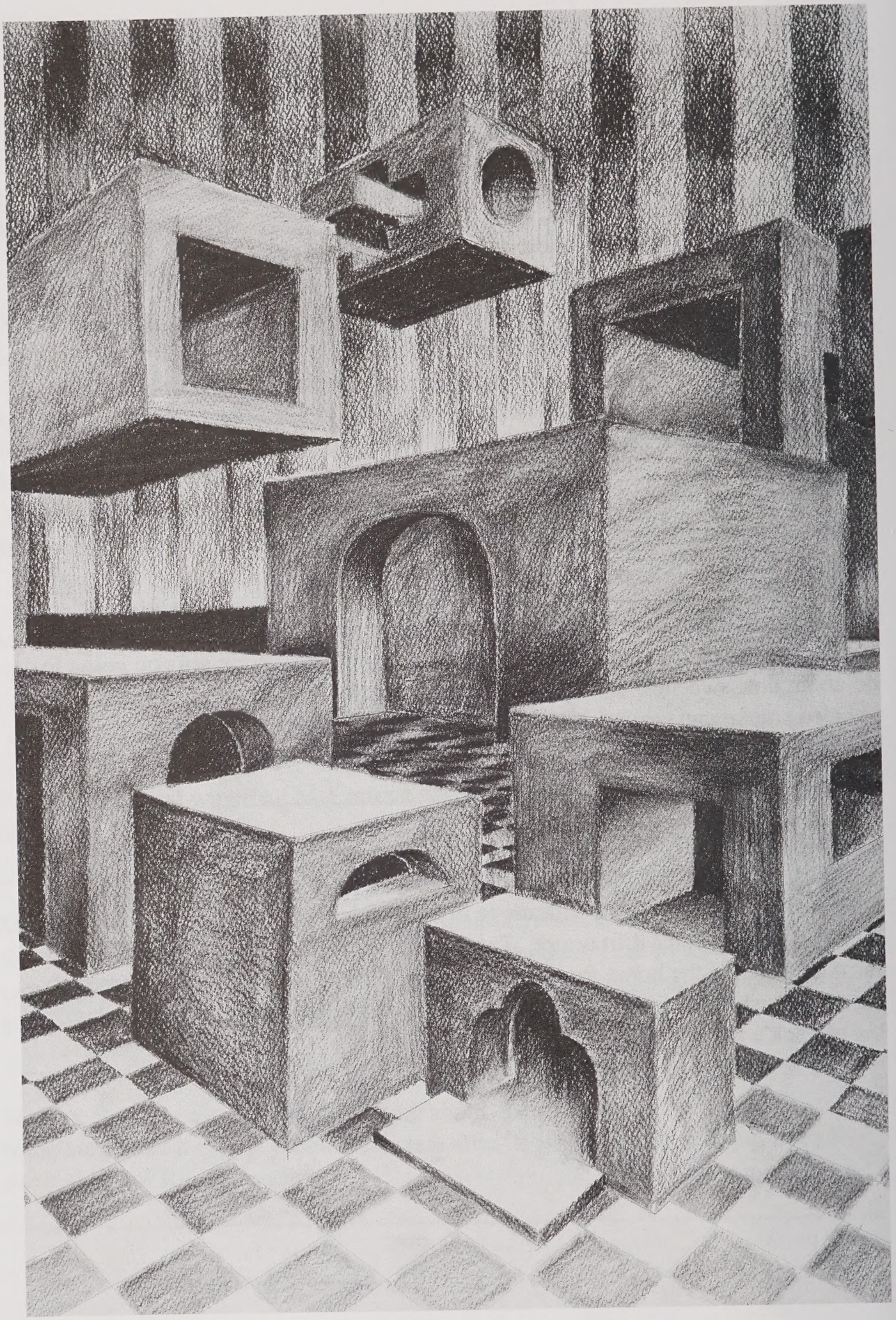
Watching *Bambi* again with my two-year-old son, the similarities between Bambi's mom's life and my own struck hard. She, too, is a single parent with sole responsibility for her child—providing food, care, shelter and life lessons. Meanwhile, Dad, "The Prince," roams the herd.

Two little blond boys, brothers, came to live at the children's home. They looked so much alike I couldn't tell them apart. They were shy and scared. It was important to get their names right. The social worker said she had the same problem until she saw them with freshly washed and combed hair. "Chris is the one with the 'C' carved in his forehead," she told me.

In speech class, we practiced breathing correctly from the diaphragm. We kept a piece of paper from falling off the wall by providing a strong and steady stream of breath to hold it there. My best friend, Don, looked over at me. "For the final exam," he said, "we have to keep up a canoe."

My neighbor Sarah turned to food for solace after her divorce. After a weight gain of well over fifty pounds, I expressed my concern. "What are you going to do about this, sweetie?" I ventured one day. She stubbed out her cigarette, exhaled smoke and replied, "Right now, I'm looking for a color that's darker than black."

My ex-husband refused to come get his belongings from my house after the divorce. One day, disgusted and slightly drunk, I bundled up all of his expensive wool jackets and took them with me to my job at the children's home. Each boy received one, whether it fit or not. Two days later, Ernest Wise, who had been the farm manager of the home for over fifty years, died. I was late to the memorial service. Rushing in the back door, I recognized, scattered throughout the church, six of Rick's jackets.



Drawing by Annie Cicale

Excerpt from *The Words of the Prophets*

JD Shackelton

"Johannes, darlin', I have to tell you something." Mary held her son in her lap as she sat on the couch. The boy's large, brown eyes looked into hers expectantly, like a trusting puppy whose master had never struck him. Seeing this, she could not speak. Her eyes filled and one tear escaped, tracking its uncertain way down her cheek.

"Don't cry, Mommie," the boy said, his own eyes serious with innocent sympathy. Mary hugged him to her and stared at blurry curtains on the bay window and outside at leaves that were just beginning to change color.

"Oh, my God!" The desperate whisper rushed out and died in the air, for amid the vast complexities of the universe no provision had been made for this need. She rocked him in her arms for long moments. He relaxed there, content in familiar warmth. "Mommie has to go away for a while," she was finally able to whisper again. There was no response, so she stopped rocking. He sat up, and she studied his face. "Mommy has to go away today."

"Where, Mommy?"

"To Grandma and Grandpa's house."

"Can I go, too?"

A faint smile. "Not this time," she said. He looked disappointed. "But sometimes I'll come get you and take you there to visit me and Grandma and Grandpa and Peter."

Bewilderment spread across the little brows. "Is baby brother going with you?"

Mary realized she had failed to anticipate this obvious conundrum. How could she explain leaving one son, but taking his brother? "Mommie wants to take you, too, darlin', but Daddy needs you here with him. Mommie loves you, and I'll come back soon and take you to Grandma and Grandpa's. And we'll all have cookies and milk, and you can ride Grandpa's tractor. Won't that be fun?" She forced a smile, hoping he would imitate it, but he didn't. "Darlin', Mommie loves you. I promise I'll come get you."

Half an hour later Johannes stood in the doorway to the dining room watching as William and Mary spoke in hushed tones with Mary leaning over the couch, changing Peter's diaper. Then she took the baby in her arms and moved to where Johannes stood. She knelt down and forced another smile as she looked into those large, sad eyes. She let Peter stand on wobbly legs beside her, supporting him with her hands. "Would you like to kiss brother good-bye?" she asked. Johannes regarded her silently, his somber eyes meeting hers with no response. His arms hung at his sides. His lower lip protruded just a little, but it did not quiver. Not a muscle twitched until his eyes blinked and then resumed their vacant staring. Mary's free arm embraced him. "I love you," she whispered. "Hug me good-bye,

Darlin'." But his arms remained passive. Mary let go and looked at him again. His eyes met hers but betrayed no feeling. He remained still. Mary stood, lifted Peter in her arms, and slowly backed away, watching Johannes. When she reached the hall doorway she forced another smile and gave him a little wave.

"Bye, Darlin'." Then she slipped into the hall, her eyes releasing the pent-up hurt in her heart. William followed her.

Johannes stood as they had left him until he heard the front door close and car doors slam. Then he crossed the living room and stood at the window. He pulled back the curtain and looked out, his head barely above the window sill. He watched his mother's gray DeSoto pull out of the drive way, turn left, and proceed down Julliard Avenue, disappearing in the distance. He stared at the street. It lay empty and barren as far as he could see until the trees blocked it from view. He stared at the trees, still like a picture because the air hung motionless around them. He stared at the grass, but nothing disturbed its even surface. No car came to violate the silence left behind. Not a branch or leaf whispered above the muted green lawn across the timeless quiet. Tears slipped down the boy's cheeks and his small shoulders heaved. From a dark womb in his heart an invisible hand crawled upward, clutched his throat, and closed like a vise.

Feet and legs were everywhere the boy looked. Shiny black shoes on tiptoes, long ones flat on the floor with raised ridges and tiny holes decorating their blackness or brownness. Dark pant legs rested on the flat ones. The legs of those on tiptoes wore stockings with dark seams in the back disappearing under dress hems at the knees or below. A forest of feet and legs on soft carpet so everyone can come and go quietly. Noise isn't allowed, which is why children must hold parents' hands and not talk. Being quiet was no problem for the boy because he hadn't uttered a word for eight months, and now no one expected him to. But here, even grown-ups must not speak except softly. Only the man in the front behind the tall desk can talk so everyone can hear him, and he must wait until after everyone sings. Then he talks for a long time. And children must sit very still on the long, padded seat and stare up at the ceiling, which is very far away and very unfriendly like cold sheets in winter before the bed warms, only this ceiling never warms or comforts. It stays far away. The songs are far away, too, even though the people are standing all around singing above him.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The boy didn't like the ghost part. It scared him and confused him. And the music belonged to the ceiling, way above him and strange and cold and meaningless.

His shoes didn't touch the floor, and even if he straightened his legs and arched his feet and stretched the toes of his patent leathers to their utmost, he

could not make contact with the back of the pew in front of him. The singing stopped and the man talked, but the boy could not understand. He knew many of the words, but they were put together so he couldn't hear what they meant. He shifted position and tried to scratch a place while no one saw, but his father rested a hand on the boy's leg. Nothing was said, but the boy understood. He sat without moving for a long time. Still the man talked. The boy didn't like church. He was not sure he would like God either.

The boy leaned forward a little to look around his father at the lady sitting close to him on the other side. Lydia. She was here every Sunday now and had been at the boy's house several times, but he was puzzled. He wasn't sure where to put her. Is she like Aunt Elizabeth? Or like the lady next door who drives the big red car with no top? Or, since she's always with Daddy, is she like Mommy?

Mommy. He had seen her a few days ago. And baby brother, who was talking now. The boy had tried to answer his brother, but couldn't. Daddy had taken him to the doctor, but the doctor hadn't known how to help small boys who had forgotten how to talk.

The lady came home with them again—Lydia. She talked to him like Mommy talked to baby brother. Daddy didn't say much to him but talked to the lady a lot. The boy smiled but said nothing.

Now in his comfortable trousers and play shoes and shirt with no tie or jacket, he felt free again. The back yard was not a yard at all, but a great forest with large trees and giant bushes that call a small boy's soul to adventure. It was all enclosed in a tall wooden fence, so he was often left to roam at will, especially when Lydia was visiting.

He stood on the back porch listening to the chirps and tweets and mating calls. He didn't know the words, but he understood the message. The birds were saying that blue is a wonderful color for the sky and that air was a delicious thing to breathe and grass was a perfect place for bare feet to walk and it was fun to play "let's find the seeds," and they were thanking the earth and the sky by singing their happy little hymns and chasing each other and weaving cozy nests in the arms of branches or in the shadowy comfort of sheltering shrubs.

The boy could not say these things or even think their words, but he knew them. He knew all of them. And they all pleased him. The high ceilings and somber tones of church could be forgotten for another week, and he could run among the budding trees and spring flowers and lush shrubbery and watch the birds. He squinted up at the sky. He felt he could reach up and touch it. It didn't seem nearly as high and far away as the church ceiling. The birds flew through that sky, but he was quite sure they wouldn't be welcome in the ceiling or on the pews or the carpet where all the shoes walked.

The boy descended the steps to the lawn. The thick grass felt good to roll on. Cool grass and blue sky and friendly trees towering protectively over him. He had learned to count, and he counted ten trees, then heard Sam barking. He ran to the dog house and dropped to his knees. The puppy squirmed and wiggled and

shook and jumped and yapped and wagged and licked all at once in a jumble of happiness that couldn't contain itself. The boy didn't know dog language, but he understood the puppy loved him. He petted Sam and squeezed him and held him to his face and kissed him, and Sam, who knew nothing of either English or the thoughts of little boys, also understood.

The boy released the clasp on the chain and Sam ran and the boy jumped up and ran after him. Together they ran as if there were no fence around the yard, or around any yard anywhere, or around any life. They ran as if running were what life was made for and the very best way to celebrate it. They ran around trees, and Sam stopped and flattened his face and front paws on the grass with his rump sticking up and his tail wagging and he growled and yipped and the boy laughed inside and ran at him, and Sam scurried around another tree and under a bush, then scampered across the lawn.

But celebration can be tiring. After a while the boy crawled into the shady alcove of several large and spreading shrubs that had grown adjacent to one another and formed a kind of den where the grass was sparse in the soft earth and a small boy could feel hidden and his puppy could feel safe to rest and pant and look up into his master's eyes and they could exchange secrets there and no one would know.

On this particular Sunday afternoon beneath the protective cover of these particular shrubs, while Mr. Bradford and Lydia discussed plans for the future, a small miracle occurred. For months the boy had not been able to ask for another helping of tapioca pudding or answer the doctor's questions or say "I love you," when his mother hugged him and cried. He had wanted to, but he couldn't. Now, as the new spring air breathed sweet flowers and fertile earth into the boy's wondering soul and he looked into the big brown eyes of this beagle puppy who licked his nose and nuzzled into his arms, he felt happy. He felt closeness and love that was, for a few brief minutes, unafraid of loss.

As he rested there in the quiet of this feeling, a bird rustled the small branches near him. She seemed not to know he was there, and Sam didn't move to chase her. In her beak she carried a tiny thread which she began to weave into a small structure not four feet away from the boy and his dog. She was a late mother, and seemed to know it, so industrious was her labor. The boy watched her shuttle between the chosen branches and the yard, returning each time with a twig or bit of grass. He knew what she was doing and what she would do when the twigs had become a nest. His mother had told him about nests. Nests were good.

For several minutes the boy sat, and the dog, silent witnesses to one of earth's common miracles. Finally, the mother-to-be rested in the nest, satisfied that her preparations were adequate. The boy could see her little eyes, her soft feathers, alert tail. He watched her stillness. For long moments she didn't move. The boy didn't move. The dog didn't move. As the boy watched her, a deep repose settled over him. His eyes became heavy, and he nearly slept.

Then the bird flew away, and the boy noticed something in the nest. It was tiny and round. He looked at it, then at his dog. The brown eyes of the dog looked up silently, saying nothing and everything. "I love you, Sam," the boy thought. Sam nuzzled deeper into the boy's arms. "You're my best friend," the boy said aloud.

Drawing by Joyce Dover

Resents Transplanting

Lee Sokol

"Resents transplanting" reads the warning on the seed packet
of *cosmos bipannatus* I ordered for this summer's garden.
I wonder at such emotion coming from a tiny seedling.
I imagine the little plant fuming with resentment
At the monstrous human parent who plucked him
From the soft bed of the seed flat in the southern window,
Patting him into a trowel-sized hole in the still-cold yard,
Leaving him to endure wind, drought, insects, late frosts,
And the neighbor's cat looking for an easy place to dig.

And if the little plant survives the transplanting
To live a life of resentment against this early uprooting,
Who does he turn to for consolation, for understanding?
I stay up late nights, poring through my gardening books,
Looking for plants who will be his friends through adolescence,
Ones who will help him grow into a well-adjusted adult.

Not the rose. She's too busy primping, and too thorny anyway.
The cleome won't do. His tall elegance might make
My simple daisy-like cosmos jealous and insecure.
And though the *papaver somniferum* is also a simple flower
And doesn't take well to transplanting either, his brand of solace
Is much too alluring and dangerous for my troubled young plant.

The bachelor button at first seems like a perfect possibility,
With a strong male name to show my cosmos how to be manly.
But then I remember he is also known as cornflower and no one
Can get the two names straight, causing constant confusion.
A plant with an identity crisis surely can't be of much help.

Then one night I find the information that relieves me of my worries,
Letting me know that my little plant just might overcome all this resentment.
Alongside a full-color photo of a bed of cosmos in brilliant bloom,
I read the caption "Cosmos thrives on neglect."

Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Communication in Space

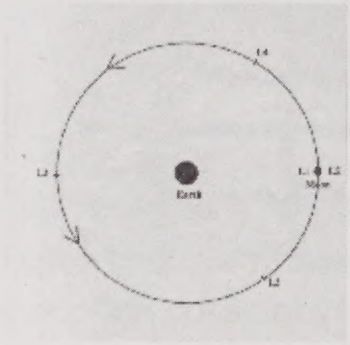
Jonathan Graham

Orbital theory begins with the German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630). Without the benefit of Newtonian physics, he empirically derived three laws that describe planetary motion in our solar system and the orbits of artificial satellites:

1) The orbit of a satellite with respect to the earth is an ellipse, the earth being at one of the foci.
2) A line drawn from the earth to a satellite sweeps across equal areas in equal times.
3) The square of the time a satellite takes to complete one orbit is proportional to the cube of its mean (average) distance from the earth.

The first law deals with the shape of an orbit, a circular orbit being a special case of the ellipse. The second law covers the speed of a satellite at various points along the orbit, and the third law has to do with the satellite's orbital period. The closer a satellite's orbit is to the earth, the faster it moves and the shorter its orbital period.

The French-Italian astronomer Joseph Louis Lagrange (1736-1813) calculated stable points in the orbit of one body around another where gravitational forces were balanced. His work was relatively forgotten until it was noticed that asteroids in the orbit of Jupiter tended to gather at these Lagrangian points, L1 through L5.



In 1969 Gerard K. O'Neill, a physics professor at Princeton, asked his students to design a large living environment in space, rather than on a planet or a moon. He published papers at Princeton in 1974 on the construction of space colonies at L5, the most stable position in the lunar orbit, 240,000 miles from the earth.

In this plan, solar-powered magnetic launchers would propel material from the moon to L2 where it would be caught by a large "catcher's mitt" and then be moved to L5 where it would be used to build large space habitats for thousands of people. One design is two counter-rotating cylinders (with a net spin of zero) always pointed toward the sun. Each cylinder would be built of strips of land and glass and would have a diameter of up to four miles and a length of up to twenty miles. A cylinder this size would rotate once every two minutes to provide one G of centrifugal force and would house up to one million people.

Lunar ore is rich in aluminum and titanium, and oxygen would be a plentiful by-product of solar-powered refining. Carbon, nitrogen, and hydrogen are scarce on the moon, so these would have to be transported from the earth. In particular, liquid hydrogen would be carried in large tanks to make thousands of gallons of water. Alternatively, these raw materials might be obtained in a low-gravity environment from asteroids.

There are three kinds of asteroids located between Mars and Jupiter. Collectively, they are rich in iron, nickel, magnesium, water, hydrocarbons, and nitrogen. They could also provide raw materials for the construction of space colonies and space ships. They might be moved from their orbits by rockets and placed in orbits near the earth, or a solar-powered manufacturing plant might be constructed at the Martian Lagrangian point L5.

After the habitats are constructed, the space colonists could earn their living by manufacturing solar-to-electric power plants to be placed in geosynchronous orbit at an altitude of 22,323 miles in the equatorial plane. The geosynchronous orbit, proposed by Arthur C. Clarke in 1947, is the orbit most commonly used by television and other communications satellites today. It has the advantage of serving fixed-dish, rather than tracking, antennas. These satellite power plants would collect solar energy and beam it as microwave energy to receiving stations on earth where it would be sold as electricity at commercial rates.

Critics of this plan say the geosynchronous orbit is already crowded and the microwave energy is likely to be disruptive to communications and also ecologically harmful. However, the idea of mining the moon for raw material, using solar power to smelt metals, and manufacturing large living environments and even planet-sized space ships in space remains tenable. The essential ingredients for living—light, air, gravity, land, and food—could be easily supplied to a living environment in space.

The far side of the moon would be an especially good environment for radio astronomy because antennae and other receiving equipment would be shielded from radio-frequency interference from the earth. Large parabolic reflectors might be constructed in craters or mounted on poles above the moon's surface. Received signals could be combined to create a very large virtual "dish" with great focusing power. Data gathered from this equipment could be transferred to the earth by lunar-orbiting satellites.

Radio-frequency signals from the earth to the moon or to space colonies at L4 or L5 take about one and one-quarter seconds to travel one way, not long enough to stifle interactive communication. In space-to-space transmissions there is no atmosphere to absorb the shorter wavelengths, so transmission frequencies above the radio frequency range, including laser light, x-rays, and positrons, could be used for communication. Optical lenses, small parabolic reflectors, and electrostatic and magnetic fields might focus these shorter wavelengths and particles.

Plans for colonizing Mars in the next two hundred years might include the construction of a "shuttle bus" placed in an elliptical orbit around Earth and Mars with a period of two years. Signals from Earth to Mars take between three and twenty-two minutes to travel in one direction, depending on the relative position of the two planets, and Mars would be eclipsed by the Sun at its greatest distance from the earth every two years.

Because of these time delays, communication would be less interactive and more terse. A radio-controlled robot on Mars would necessarily be intelligent enough to make decisions while awaiting further communication from Earth.

Travel distances will be the major restriction for interstellar people-to-people communication. There are eleven stars within 11.1 light years from us, a limit for human migration using present travel technology. At greater distances than these, we might communicate with non-human intelligence.

Fusion power will be the breakthrough in interstellar travel. Traveling near the speed of light, the passengers will experience relativistic time-dilation effects, extending travel distances and human migration throughout the galaxy.

According to relativity theory, developed by Max Planck and Albert Einstein, a distance like 100 light years would take much less than 100 years to travel, as measured on the ship. As the ship approaches the speed of light, the travel time becomes almost instantaneous.

There are two major designs that can provide artificial gravity for interstellar travel: One is a flat ship or an apartment building that accelerates and decelerates at one G, a space elevator. The other is the rotating Stanford torus, living in a doughnut.

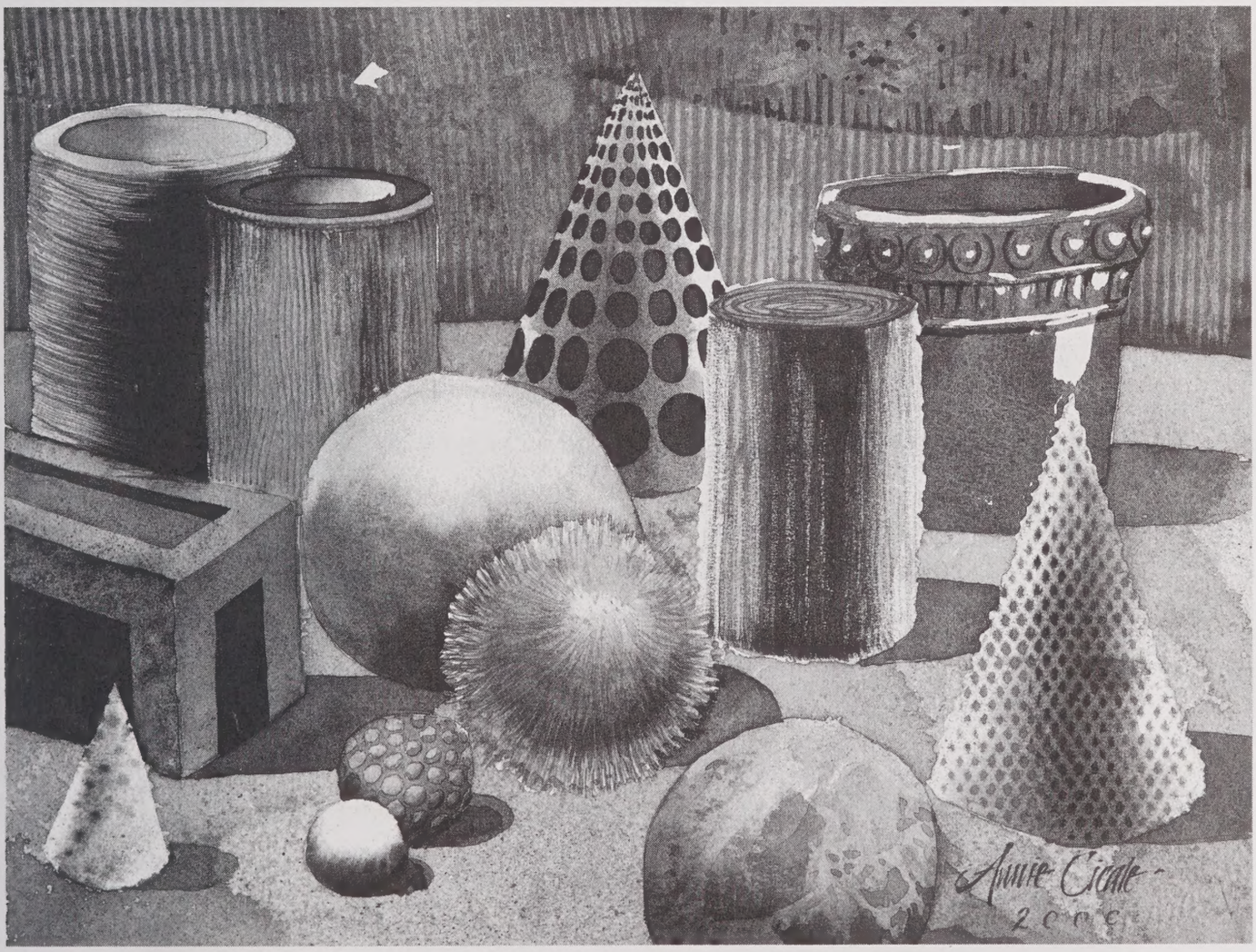
The front part of the interstellar space ships will be a huge scoop to collect free hydrogen in space to use as fuel. The middle will either be an apartment building or some variant of a rotating wheel or cylinder. The rear will be the fusion engine, which will use the controlled power of a hydrogen bomb for propulsion.

Interstellar space ships will be like small traveling stars. They will communicate throughout the galaxy by modulating their fusion reactions and exhaust. The output of entire stars might also be modulated by gravity or by huge plates in space with electrostatic or magnetic fields for communication at maximum distances.

Interstellar communication will be slow. Requests for physical supplies will not be important, since the travel time will be so great. Scientific data, music, philosophy, and the visual arts might be the major subjects of conversation for mutating gene pools of divergent civilizations.

These red-shifted, long-distance messages will become historical records, traveling backwards in time through an expanding universe. Such communication would tend to be one-way and documentary in nature. It could be made more effective by including if-then-else or case a, b, c logic in questions that anticipate long-delayed replies. The problem of administrators dominating the mikes might be overcome by sorting information contained in the conglomerate of many individual data packets at the receiver.

There are one to two hundred billion stars in our Milky Way galaxy, which rotates once every 200 million years. It has a diameter of 100,000 light years and is 5 to 10,000 light years in thickness. The Local Group, the half-dozen galaxies of which we are a part, is also a further boundary.



Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Water Dreams

Rebecca K. Davis

I knew him when his boat
was a tiny Boston Whaler
All flat, blunt-nosed, well-worn
and well-loved for it reflected his life.

He was scruffy like a mongrel puppy
All red-headed, red-bearded
Lacking only the gold ring in his ear
to show the pirate inside.

We played in and on and explored the water
of our almost-personal lake—all summer long
We fished in the water, we skinny-dipped in the water
And we took moonlight, silent rides on silver.

I knew him when he moved to the coast
and acquired his grand cabin boat, all 34 feet in length
All polished with bedroom, bath and bar.
It was slick with silver chrome and strength.

He was balding and round with eyes that twinkled
and a mouth that crinkled in mischief and fun.
He rode his boat like a horse on the plains
knees absorbing the bumps of the ocean waves.

We played on and in and explored the water
of the fathomless sound—occasionally
We soared and sped through
Sheets of white water while squinting
At the salty sun, all around.

I know him now, when he pictures his three-roomed yacht
With galley, Jacuzzi, and big-screen TV
In dreams he travels down the Intracoastal Waterway
He envisions sunny, slothful summers in the Chesapeake
and winter in the kinky, kinetic Keys.

He dreams of weekends past
And wild, carefree campfires
That burn images of total abandon
And wanton, unbridled fun.

We paid homage and were lastingly loyal to the beer gods
And we appeased Poseidon for the use of his water
We miss the old, small boat with every passing decade
When life was simpler, slower and clear

But he still transforms to Neptune, becoming almost tall
With his latest boat becoming his trident true
Always hoping newer, bigger toys make up for long, lost times
As he rides the waving, washing waters to forget or perhaps to recall.

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Going

Deborah Harmon

Loss upon loss
Home, but not yours
They call it a home
Anyway

Breathing labored
Vision fading
Not enough strength to right yourself in the chair
Or pull a blanket to warm you

Tremors growing
Speech sliding
A lift to move you from place to place
A constant need for a glass of cool water

Dependent
On the care of professionals
The whims of workers
The kindness of anyone

Don't give up on her I encourage the staff
Don't give up on yourself I encourage her
Don't give up I echo
To myself

Still there are moments
A passion for reading still shared
Now we explore those worlds out there
Time suspended together

Brightening as we discuss
Grandchildren and trials and tribulations of everyday life
Snippets of the outside brought in
A little mail, treasured, read and reread.

Days of pain
Of boredom too heartrending to consider carefully
Kisses and expressions of love
Can't erase reality

Loss
Yours
And
Mine

Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Jumping Into Memory

Chris Tibbetts

A woman stands quietly on the covered dock of the lake, leaning over the railing, breathing deeply the swampy odor of the freshwater lake. She observes the action around her, unbothered by the raucous shouts of water skiers yelling directions to their drivers in the powerboats or the taunting dares yelled by teenagers to their friends high up in the limbs of the nearby cypress tree. As each inboard craft makes its pass around the perimeter of the cove, the wake increases in intensity as the sound of the motor dies. The wakes of the boats slap rhythmically against the dock posts and shore, insistent at first, and then slowly losing intensity, until the water comes again to a temporary lull.

The dock vibrates with the flip-flopped footsteps of a boy and a girl, weighed down with all their fishing gear—tackle boxes, long bamboo poles, fish net, and a crushed sandwich bag partly filled with pieces of sandwich bread and Oscar Mayer, destined to become bait. Both adolescents are freckled and towheaded, reflecting a summer spent outdoors, and they each have the same blue eyes squinting into the glare of the sun that bounces off of the water's surface. As the woman watches, the children progress to the end of the dock with their equipment, surprisingly graceful despite their gangly limbs, still too long for the rest of their bodies. The hint of a smile pulls the older woman's eyes into slits, only the crinkles at the corners giving away her age. A faraway look comes into her eyes as she turns back to the lake. As she gazes into the water's reflection, she remembers . . .

"I won't tell if you won't tell."

"Mom said we're not allowed to even go NEAR the Jump Tree! If she finds out, we're dead!"

"The only way she'll find out is if we die jumping, in which case we couldn't get into trouble, because we'd be dead. Besides, we're never going to catch any fish today—all the boats are scaring them away, even if they would bite this nasty wheat bread. I wish Mom would start buying Wonder Bread again."

"Well, OK, but if we get caught, it's your fault!" The boy and girl pack their tackle neatly and pile it near the bank. They nervously look up at the long limb of the tree hanging over the water, seemingly a mile high.

"I'll go first!" the girl calls out, her bravado hiding the nervousness underneath. She takes off her shorts and camp T-shirt, revealing a chlorine-faded tangerine one-piece. She begins to climb up the rope ladder that hangs down the trunk, her legs strong and sure after a summer of activity. Avoiding the temptation to look downwards, she counts the ladder's rungs as she climbs—twenty, twenty-five, twenty-seven . . . . With one last burst of effort, she

pulls herself up into the crook of the tree and waves to her brother below. Then she inhales deeply before taking a tentative first step onto the limb. Her feet search for the best foothold, like a tightrope walker at the circus, every toe put to use. She takes another baby step, and then another, out onto the limb. As she gets closer to the thin end, the limb wobbles slightly with her weight and she pauses to regain her balance, arms out to her sides, knees bent to absorb the limb's movement. Over water now, she feels more at ease—if she were to lose her balance, her fall would be cushioned. Even so, she knows the jump is not without risk, because the water is not very deep at that point. From watching the older kids jump, she knows that she must leap out as far as she can, beyond the point where the water is shallow enough to see through to the bottom, out into the greenish-brown opaque water beyond the shoreline. Otherwise, she will be impaled upon the cypress tree knees, their knobby cylindrical roots protruding out of the water's surface.

Not wanting her younger brother to detect her fear, she turns the last few steps into a running leap, hurling herself feet first into the air. A moment of seeming suspension—then the long, leaded drop before violently plunging into the still water below. For a moment she feels disoriented, not knowing which way is up, then remembers to extend her legs to cushion the impact before she hits the lake floor. As soon as she feels gooey mud floor squishing up through her toes, she immediately reverses the propulsion, with her strong legs shooting herself up and out of the water like a rocket. As she breaks the surface, she gasps for air, the adrenaline still rushing through her veins. A victorious smile lights up her face, the joy reflected in her brother's face as well, until she says, "Your turn!"

He suddenly looks the full three years younger that he is, a small boy looking fear in the face, wanting to give into it. But, in true comrade style, he walks over to the rope ladder, and with his first foothold, commits to follow her lead.

The woman wakes up from her reverie with a start as the young girl yells, "I've got one!" The woman can't keep from laughing with glee as the girl struggles as if fighting a ten-pound bass and is finally rewarded with the catch of a two-ounce bream. The girl grips the fish around the belly, being careful to hold the sharp fins downwards inside the palm while she expertly removes the hook from the fish's mouth. Then, without ceremony, she tosses the fish back into the water below; the observer intuitively knows that for the girl the fun of fishing is in the thrill of the first tug of the line more than the capture of another life. As the woman watches, she can't help but wonder at what point in her own life she last commanded that total lack of self-consciousness that the young girl in front of her embodies.

"Let's go to the swimming area and catch some minnows—my turtles

have eaten almost all of the ones we got last week."

"OK, but not the pretty black and white speckled one—it's too neat to become turtle food." Brother and sister gather their belongings, including the all-important net, and start off down the narrow trail which meanders down the length of the park next to the water's edge. The dense carpet of pine needles, layering years upon years, muffles their footsteps as they walk single file. As they round a curve, leaving one azalea-encircled "room" and heading into the next, they peek around the corner before continuing, stopping to make sure the secluded area is not being used by a couple for some private necking. Interrupting that gooey stuff always makes them feel embarrassed. The coast is clear, so they continue. Several "rooms" later they pass the Grecian-style monument—five white columns supporting a small terrace and sitting ledge. They never linger here unless Mom is with them; she likes to use this monument to stage "Kodak Moments"—when they were younger, she made them wear coordinated "his-and-her" outfits.

They finally make it to "the wall," a small horizontal cement wall used to prevent the boats' wakes from splashing up and eroding the bank, on which perches a bench. The wall causes the water there to form shallow pools, ideal breeding grounds for minnows, snails, and small turtles. Instead of jumping off of the wall into the water, which would frighten the minnows away, the children sit down on the ledge and gingerly ease into the shallows. The girl and boy resemble egrets, bent over, silently stalking their prey; with a "whoosh," surprising in its suddenness, one child pounces upon some unsuspecting creature. Next comes the expectant look into the bottom of the net. One set of blue eyes immediately knows the outcome by the look of disappointment or happiness in the other set. In the background near the center of the park, a wedding is taking place, a common occurrence here in the serene park; the juxtaposition of the formal ceremony alongside the bait-catching episode a tableau of contrasts. When the kids capture as many minnows as they need (with the bonus of two snails), they pack up quietly and skirt the edges of the ceremony, the girl looking on surreptitiously. Even though she is at the age when boys other than her brothers are icky and have cooties, she thinks, "When I get married someday, I want to have the wedding here."

If only deciding a thing could make it so, the woman reflects. On this trip she is traveling by herself, but the last time she visited she was with her husband-to-be. It had been important to her to bring her beloved to this place to share its peace and beauty, even though they would not be married here, as she had envisioned as a child. Practical reasons like logistics and finances had prevented the realization of the childhood daydream. She pointed out the Jump Tree and other landmarks as they strolled along the trails, had a stranger take their photograph at the Greek monument, and even smooched a little in the hidden azalea "room." But instead of being content to sit on the lakeside bench and watch

crew practice, he had said with a smirk, "It must be nice for them to be able to row every afternoon after classes instead of going to work."

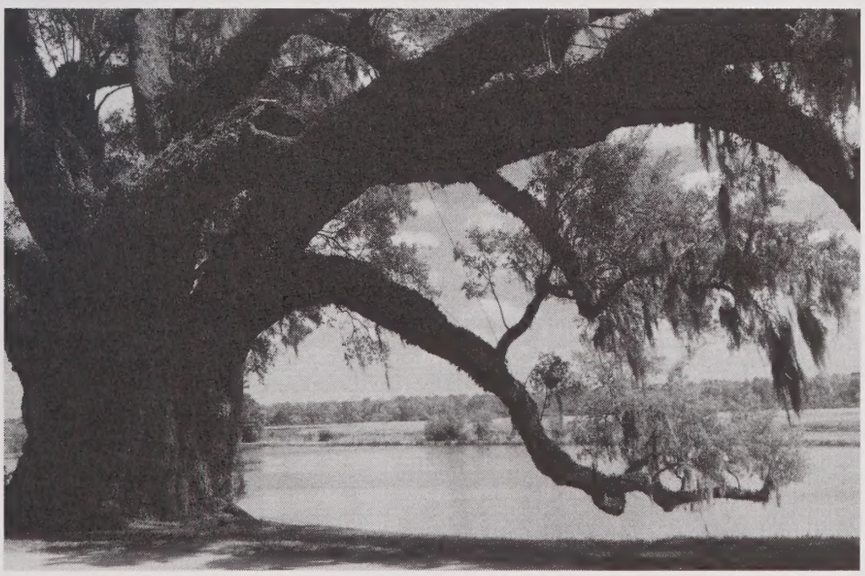
"I'm sure some of them have part-time jobs."

"Maybe, but they don't have to work."

The distinction noted, she realized that her memories would always be that—hers—miraculously preserved from childhood, untainted by the pessimism of an adult's mind. She and her future husband would make their own memories together, but those she had made with her brother would always stay in an exclusive place in her mind's eye.

They run like banshees, barefoot alongside the canal's walls, racing to beat the progress of the boat in the shallow moat. They run hysterically, their speed a race according to the complex rules of some make-believe game. The pot-bellied, middle-aged strangers in the boat look on with bemusement, their condescending smirks expressing that stale expression "kids will be kids." They have forgotten the joy of running full out for the sake of running, the desperate exhilaration of the last few days of summer— extending playtime past dusk into early evening with the aid of flashlights and a full moon. They do not need the convenient light provided by these beams; they know the park's contours as well as those of their own homes and can navigate their way back blindfolded if need be.

The barked orders of the crew boat's coxswain remind her of the time; reassuring in its constancy, college crew practice has always begun promptly at four o'clock. The woman turns and walks slowly down the dock towards the shore, waving a friendly good-bye to the kids still fishing. Perhaps someday she and her brother will bring their own children here to play, giving them the gift of time to be kids, to make memories of their own, and to have only fears of the kind that can be conquered by closing one's eyes and jumping.



Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Post-Women's Poetry Night at Malaprop's Café
Inspirational Goulash

Bonnie Temple Cassara

I want to write tonight
something that's outta sight
something with guts and gusto
something
I would be proud to show
something
meaningful and deep
something
rich and wide and steep
yep, I want to write something rich
I want to write something that will hitch
my wagon to a star and shoot it far
into the milky way of meaningful stuff

but kinda off the cuff

yes, I want to write something thick with incredible wit
that's subtle a bit
yet probing and somehow poking fun at it

now that's getting close to it

I want to write something wild, carnivorous and beastly
but on the edges tinged with saintly and priestly,
yet sensual and sizzling, smoking and steaming,
heaping some audience appeal on all that meaning

I want to write something brilliant and scintillating
It could even be about mating or masturbating
something shimmering and glimmering
full of puns and alliterations,
onomatopoeias and immaculate gradations

of meaning

Yes, I will write something marvelous, impeccable and perilous
I will write something feisty and festive and garrulous
I'll write it tonight!
I'll write it with guts and with gusto
and it will be

outta sight!

Painting by Bonnie Temple Cassara

Mars Plea Bargain

Jim Bailey

Please Goddess Venus
For a sister
Render a verdict
Final not fatal
A wound appropriate
But not disabling

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

The Chapel

Dara Llewellyn

The Spinnets, an older couple, no children,
Attended Hominy Valley Baptist when the doors were open.
They stood as supporters when my parents joined the church,
Mrs. Spinnet holding my hand.

They lived near the foot of Mt. Pisgah,
A home in the forest, graced by wild flowers,
And invited us home for Sunday dinner
Fried chicken, green beans, corn on the cob.

Once, Mrs. Spinnet took me by the hand,
Walked me out to the edge of the woods,
And there, just past a stand of pines,
Showed me a congregation of jack-in-the-pulpits.

The mountain flowers created their own church,
Tall green pulpits, bobbing purple-green flags,
Waving in the hushed, pine-needle forest,
Silent testimony to the Creator of All.

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Time Standing Still

Rebecca K. Davis

This house oozed character
like that poignant scent in the air
that crosses time to sweep you back, instantly
to that first moment you entered.

The chandelier had a ruby-red, two-inch, glass marble
hanging from the glittery, glass pendants
and candle lights that spidered out
like an upside-down umbrella.

The expensive 1920s couch
was ugly brown velvet
with sloping expansive arms
that I could sit upon.

The carpet with its centered
faded floral pattern
on dull brown wool
reflected the image of the chandelier.

The beveled glass, white oak, built-in book cases
outshone the oak and glass French doors
that lead to the music room, left
and the formal dining room, right.

I looked at the massive staircase
that meandered upstairs with its two landings
one large enough to become my mother's sewing room
with its built-in, hinged benches and porthole windows.

I loved the secret hiding places
the padded benches provided
as they lined the staircase upstairs and down
even if they were just for canned goods.

I pictured dead bodies in the benches
like our own personal caskets
built in for our convenience
with creaky hinges and the smell of death.

Rumor in our family said my grandmother
built her dream house in the middle
of smelly, grimy Canton
so her kids could walk to school.

Pushbutton light switches were all over the house
top white—bottom black, it was dark or it was light
ghosts inhabited the switchboxes
since there was often a delay upon turning on the lights.

Darkness was not my friend when I was little
And there were too many dank, dark closets, canning rooms and pantries—
the house lived on its own terms and in its own time
and it did not like light.

Outside was wonderful and bright
with a veranda and a porch with inviting chairs
a brick terrace above for climbing on the roof
to set off loud firecrackers to light the sky.

The yard was small but safe and comforting—
a Mimosa tree spread its smooth small limbs up
for me to climb and the bark was not rough or dark
but warm and light.

I added a ridiculous rocking footstool
for my throne in my castle tree
I watched for the neighbors, the stalking cats,
the barking dogs, and the slow moving cars

There was no darkness here or ghosts
and time stood still
while I listened to the humming bees in the bee-bush
near the fluffy snowball hedges

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

The Ruby Glasses

Nelda F. Holder

The ruby glasses sat
inside the cabinet
inside the kitchen
inside my grandmother's home
inside the circle of family
inside the heart of my being

They sit there still
as my small hands
remove one just so carefully
and lift it to my ruby lips
to sip the thick white cream
of Christmas, boiled custard
which it now holds
inside its ruby throat
inside the warmth
inside the taste of memory

I never dropped
one ruby glass
one drop of cream
one delicious smile
inside the eyes
inside the face
inside the ruby fireside glow

She is still proud
inside her corset
inside her apron
inside her ritual
inside her future and my past

The Field

Nelda F. Holder

From the kitchen window
Or the tree swing
From the screen porch glider
Or the rocking chair
There was one view

It was a gentle view
Soft to the eye and heart
Full of summer memory
And winter stubble

Leading back to the homestead

The barn, first
Cool cement floor
Hosed by hand
After the morning's milking
The rhythmic, sighing whoosh of the lines
The smell of steaming urine
And molasses-laced feed
The rough pink tongues
And big rolling eyes
Of the soft-flanked bovines
The soap-scented callouses
Of my granddaddy's hands

Then down the driveway
Past the pear tree
The fig bush
To the back door

The sound of the springcoil
Stretching
To open
To open
To open
To open
One time more

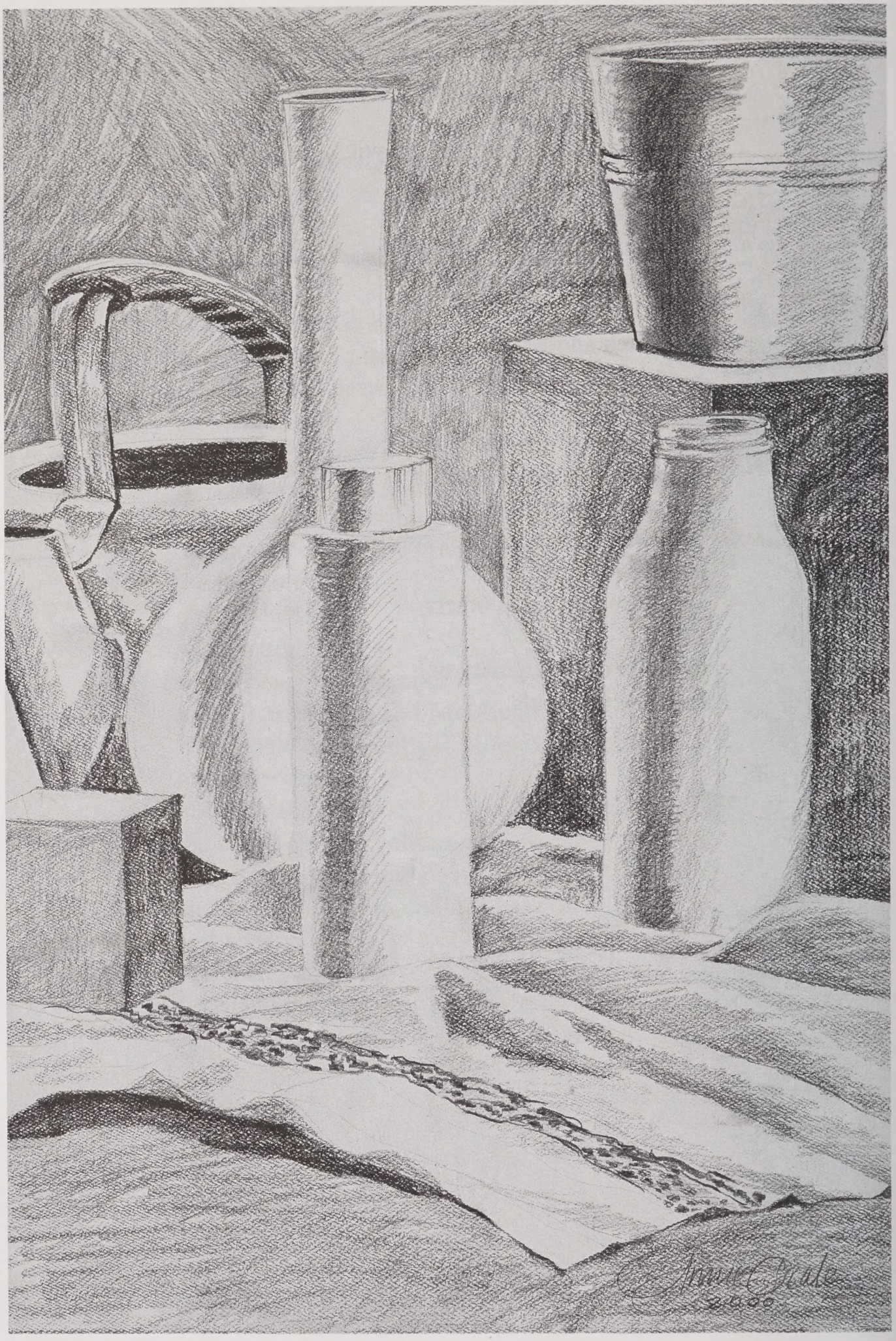
Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Chekhov

Julia Duncan

I look at a portrait on my desk
and read words on a page—
savor them—
as if they were written by a lover
to me.
But the picture is of you,
handsome with pince-nez,
mustache and beard,
an image taken
one hundred years ago.
And the words are from letters—
to your sister, describing your journey to Siberia,
its jolting carriage ride over muddy roads,
the frozen nights,
eternal cold. . . ;
a last letter to Olga—
words teasing and tender
to the actress wife and late-found joy
who would be part of your life
only five years.
For your illness,
the blood-spitting consumption—
with its weakness and pain
and treatments of morphine
and arsenic—
snatched you away
(as Shelley might say
Soon, too soon—).

But to me you are alive,
looking intently from the gilt frame
as if eager to hear my thoughts;
and your words are
vibrant with compassion and wit.
It seems I share you—
like a rare secret—
with those I feel most close to
as if I were handing over
a candle
to lighten another's way.
For you reveal the world—
illuminate us—
wise and much-esteemed author.
Like a father, you guide;
like a lover, you caress
with words that make us sublime
in their reading.
So I pass you on to others,
a spark
to ignite our imaginations,
emblaze our souls.



Drawing by Annie Cicale

Late to Poems

Jim Bailey

Middle school English and eager to flee
James Dean swaggers and cocked heads
Chopped and channeled chariots
Pink shirts and saddle shoes
Pleasure Island and 13 weeks of bliss
Camp Nowhere and more of the same
Glimpses of greatness and not ever to be
Lines at the Capitol and hope dashed in the street
Fuzzy cheeks and jungle encounters
Pray-for-pay palaces and managed campaigns
Poetry has come home to me

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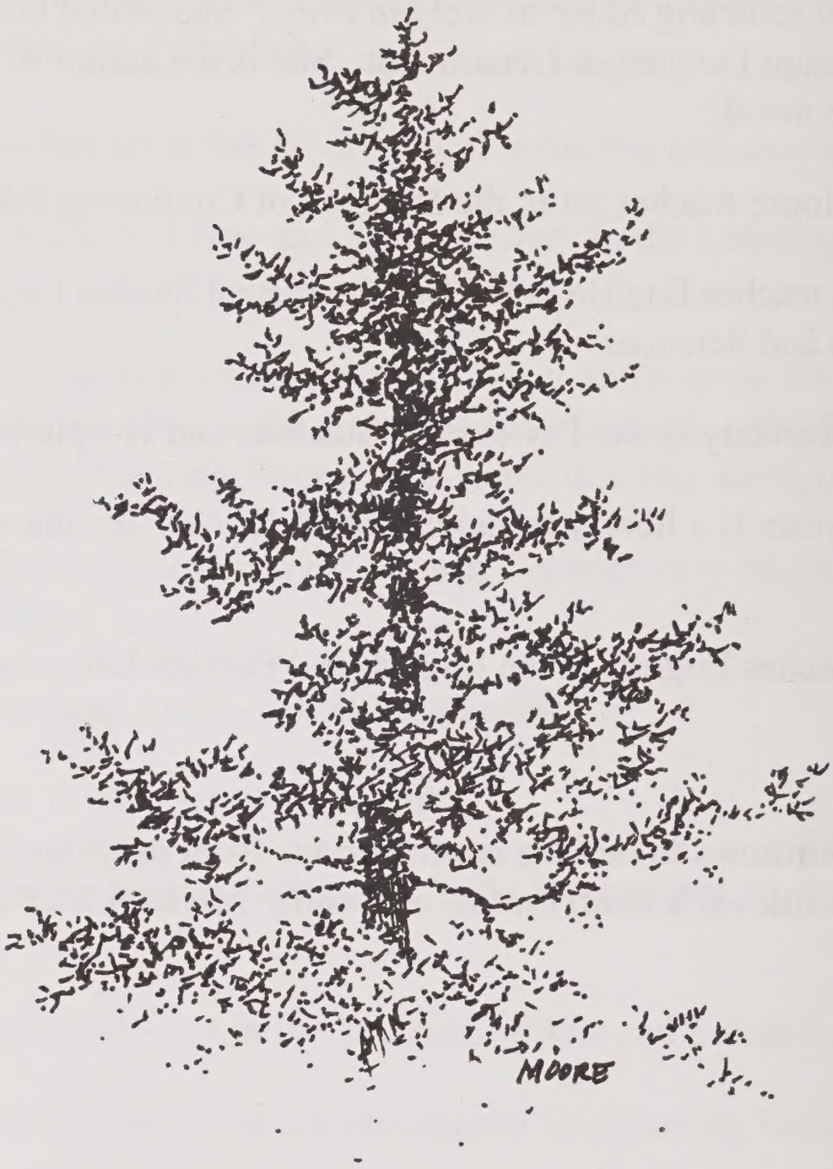

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore